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D I S S E R T A T I O N  
O N  
M I R A C L E S :

C O N T A I N I N G

An Examination of the Principles advanced by DAVID HUME, Esq;

In an ESSAY on MIRACLES.

By GEORGE CAMPBELL, D.D.  
Principal of the Marischal College, and one of  
the Ministers, of ABERDEEN.

*The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear  
witness of me. JOHN X. 25.*

E D I N B U R G H :

Printed for A. KINCAID & J. BELL.

Sold by A. MILLAR, R. & J. DODSLEY, W. JOHNSTON,  
R. BALDWIN, and J. RICHARDSON, London.

M D C C L X I I .



A

DISSEMINATION

ON

MIRACLES

CONTAINING

An Examination of the Principles of the  
Religion of the Jews, &c.

IN AN ESSAY



BY GEORGE

Trinity of the Methodist College, and one of  
the Ministers of the Church.

The author of the 'History of the  
Religion of the Jews, &c.'

EDINBURGH

Printed by A. K. & Co. 11, B. R.

Edinburgh, A. K. & Co. 11, B. R.  
F. B. & Co. 11, B. R.

MDCCLXII.

TO  
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE,  
JOHN EARL OF BUTE,  
ONE OF HIS MAJESTY'S PRINCIPAL  
SECRETARIES OF STATE,  
CHANCELLOR OF THE MARISCHAL  
COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY OF  
ABERDEEN,

THE FOLLOWING DISSERTATION,  
IN DEFENCE OF A RELIGION,  
OF WHICH HE IS AN EMINENT PA-  
TRON AND EXAMPLE,

IS,  
WITH THE UTMOST RESPECT  
AND GRATITUDE,

INSCRIB'D BY  
HIS LORDSHIP'S  
MOST DUTIFUL,  
MOST DEVOTED, AND  
MOST HUMBLE SERVANT,

GEORGE CAMPBELL.



## A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

**T**IS not the only, nor even the chief, design of these sheets, to refute the reasoning and objections of Mr Hume, with regard to miracles: the chief design of them is, to set the principal argument for Christianity in its proper light. On a subject that hath been so often treated, 'tis impossible to avoid saying many things which have been said before. It may, however, with reason be affirmed, that there still remains, on this subject, great scope for new observations. Besides, it ought to be remember'd, that the evidence of any complex argument depends very much on the order into which the material circumstances are digested, and the manner in which they are display'd.

The *Essay on Miracles* deserves to be consider'd, as one of the most dangerous at-



vi    A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

tacks that have been made on our religion. The danger results not solely from the merit of THE PIECE; it results much more from that of THE AUTHOR. *The piece* itself, like every other work of Mr Hume, is ingenious; but its merit is more of the oratorical kind than of the philosophical. The merit of *the author*, I acknowledge, is great. The many useful volumes he hath published of *history*, and on *criticism*, *politics*, and *trade*, have justly procur'd him, with all persons of taste and discernment, the highest reputation as a writer. What pity is it, that this reputation should have been sullied by attempts to undermine the foundations both of *natural religion*, and of *reveal'd*!

For my own part, I think it a piece of justice in me, to acknowledge the obligations I owe the author, before I enter on the propos'd examination. I have not only been much entertain'd and instructed  
by

# ADVERTISEMENT. vii

by his works; but, if I am possess'd of any talent in abstract reasoning, I am not a little indebted to what he hath written on *human nature*, for the improvement of that talent. If therefore, in this tract, I have refuted Mr Hume's *Essay*, the greater share of the merit is perhaps to be ascrib'd to Mr Hume himself. The compliment which the Russian monarch, after the famous battle of Poltowa, paid the Swedish generals, when he gave them the honourable appellation of his *masters in the art of war*, I may, with great sincerity, pay my acute and ingenious adversary.

I shall add a few things concerning the occasion and form of the following dissertation.

Some of the principal topics here discuss'd, were more briefly treated in a *sermon* preached before the *synod* of ABERDEEN, and are now made public at their desire. To the end that an argument of so great

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importance might be more fully and freely canvass'd than it could have been, with propriety, in a sermon, it was judg'd necessary to new-model the discourse, and to give it that form in which it now appears.

The *edition* of Mr Hume's essays to which I always refer in this work, is that printed at LONDON, in duodecimo, 1750, intitled, *Philosophical essays concerning human understanding*. I have, since finishing this tract, seen a later *edition*, in which there are a few *variations*. None of them appear'd to me so material, as to give ground for altering the *quotations* and *references* here us'd. There is indeed one *alteration*, which candour requir'd that I should mention: I have accordingly mention'd it in a note\*.

The *arguments* of the essayist I have endeavour'd to refute by *argument*. Mere *declamation* I know no way of refuting,

\* page 214.

but

# ADVERTISEMENT. ix

but by *analysing* it; nor do I conceive how *inconsistencies* can be answer'd otherwise than by *exposing* them. In such *analysis* and *exposition*, which, I own, I have attempted without ceremony or reserve, an air of *ridicule* is unavoidable: but this *ridicule*, I am well aware, if founded in *misrepresentation*, will at last rebound upon *myself*. It is possible, that, in some things, I have *mistaken* the author's meaning; I am conscious, that I have not, in any thing, designedly *misrepresented* it.

CON-



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A  
DISSERTATION  
ON  
MIRACLES.



E R R A T A.

*Pag. lin.*

152 7 *read* the power of working miracles,

161 21 *for* lies *read* is

163 6 & 7 *for* lies against both. *read* affects them both.

xiv

INTRODUCTION.

“CHRISTIANITY,” it hath been said,  
“is not founded in argument.”

If it were only meant by these words, that the religion of Jesus could not, by the single aid of reasoning, produce its full effect upon the heart; every true Christian would cheerfully subscribe to them. No arguments unaccompanied by the influences of the Holy Spirit, can convert the soul from sin to God; though even to such conversion, arguments are, by the agency of the Spirit, render'd subservient. Again, if we were to understand by this aphorism, that the principles of our religion could never have been discover'd, by the natural and unassisted faculties of man; this position, I presume, would be as little disputed as the former. But if, on the contrary, under the cover of an ambiguous expression, it is

A

intended

## 2 INTRODUCTION.

intended to insinuate, that those principles, from their very nature, can admit no rational evidence of their truth, (and this, by the way, is the only meaning which can avail our antagonists) the gospel, as well as common sense, loudly reclaims against it.

The Lord JESUS CHRIST, the author of our religion, often argu'd, both with his disciples and with his adversaries, as with reasonable men, on the principles of reason. Without this faculty, he well knew, they could not be susceptible either of religion or of law. He argu'd from prophecy, and the conformity of the event to the prediction \*. He argu'd from the testimony of John the Baptist, who was generally acknowledged to be a prophet†. He argu'd from the miracles which he himself perform'd ‡, as uncontrovertible evidences, that GOD Almighty operated

\* Luke xxiv. 25. &c. John v. 39. & 46. † John v. 32. & 33.

‡ John v. 36. x. 25. 37. 38. xiv. 10. 11.

by

# INTRODUCTION. 3

by him, and had sent him. He expostulates with his enemies, that they did not use their reason on this subject. *Why, says he, even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right\*?* In like manner we are called upon by the apostles of our Lord, to act the part of *wise men*, and judge impartially of *what they say* †. Those who do so, are highly commended, for the candour and prudence they discover, in an affair of so great consequence ‡. We are even commanded, to be *always ready to give an answer to every man, that asketh us a reason of our hope* §§; in *meekness to instruct them that oppose themselves\*\**; and *earnestly to contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints* ††. God has neither in natural nor reveal'd religion, left himself without a witness; but has in both given moral and external evidence, sufficient to convince

\* Luke xii. 57.

† 1 Cor. x. 15.

‡ Acts xvii. 11.

§ 1 Peter iii. 15.

\*\* 2 Tim. ii. 25.

†† Jude 3.



#### 4 INTRODUCTION

the impartial, to silence the gainfayer, and to render the atheist and the unbeliever without excuse. This evidence it is our duty to attend to, and candidly to examine. We must *prove all things*, as we are expressly enjoin'd in holy writ, if we would ever hope to *hold fast that which is good* \*. Thus much I thought proper to premise, not to serve as an apology for the design of this tract, (the design surely needs no apology, whatever the world may judge of the execution) but to expose the shallowness of that pretext, under which the advocates for infidelity in this age commonly take shelter. Whilst therefore we enforce an argument, which, in support of our religion, was so frequently insisted on by its divine founder, we will not dread the reproachful titles of *dangerous friends*, or *disguised enemies* of revelation. Such are the titles, which the writer, whose sen-

\* 1 Thess. v. 21.

timents

## INTRODUCTION 5

iments: we propose in these papers to canvass, hath bestow'd on his antagonists\*; not, I believe, through malice against them, but as a sort of excuse for himself, or at least a handle for introducing a very strange and unmeaning compliment to the religion of his country, after a very bold attempt to undermine it. We will however do him the justice to own, that he hath put it out of our power to retort the charge. No intelligent person, who hath carefully perused the *Essay on Miracles*, will impute to the author either of those ignominious characters.

My primary intention in undertaking an answer to the aforesaid essay, hath invariably been, to contribute all in my power, to the defence of a religion, which I esteem the greatest blessing conferred by Heaven on the sons of men. It is at the same time a secondary motive of considerable weight, to vindicate philosophy, at least that most im-

portant branch of it which ascertains the rules of reasoning, from those absurd consequences, as I imagine, which this author's theory naturally leads us to. The theme is arduous. The adversary is both subtle and powerful. With such an adversary, I should on very unequal terms enter the lists, had I not the advantage of being on the side of truth. And an eminent advantage this doubtless is. It requires but moderate abilities to speak in defence of a good cause. A good cause demands but a distinct exposition and a fair hearing; and we may say with great propriety, it will speak for itself. But to adorn error with the semblance of truth, and *make the worse appear the better reason*, requires all the arts of ingenuity and invention; arts in which few or none have been more expert than Mr Hume. It is much to be regretted, that on some occasions he hath so ill applied them.



# DISSERTATION

O N

## MIRACLES.

### PART I.

Miracles are capable of proof from testimony, and religious miracles are not less capable of this evidence than others.

### SECTION I.

*Mr Hume's favourite argument is founded on a false hypothesis.*

**I**T is not the aim of this author to evince, that miracles, if admitted to be true, would not be a sufficient evidence of a divine mission. His design is

8 MIRACLES CAPABLE OF Part I.

is solely to prove, that miracles which have not been the objects of our own senses, at least such as are said to have been perform'd in attestation of any religious system, cannot reasonably be admitted by us, or believ'd on the testimony of others.

"A miracle," says he, "supported by any human testimony, is more properly a subject of derision than of argument \*."

Again, in the conclusion of his essay, "Up-

"on the whole, it appears, that no testimo-

"ny for any kind of miracle, can ever pos-

"sibly amount to a probability, much

"less to a proof †." Here he concludes

against all miracles. "Any kind of mi-

"racle" are his express words. He seems

however immediately sensible, that in as-

serting this, he hath gone too far; and

therefore, in the end of the same para-

graph, retracts part of what he had ad-

vanc'd in the beginning: "We may e-

\* p. 194.

† p. 202.

" establish



Sect. I. PROOF FROM TESTIMONY. 9

“ establish it as a maxim, that no human  
“ testimony can have such force, as to  
“ prove a miracle, and make it a just founda-  
“ tion for any system of religion.” In  
the note on this passage, he has these  
words. “ I beg the limitation here made,  
“ may be remarked, when I say that a  
“ miracle can never be prov’d, so as to be  
“ the foundation of a system of religion.  
“ For I own that otherwise there may  
“ possibly be miracles, or violations of the  
“ usual course of nature, of such a kind,  
“ as to admit of proof from human testi-  
“ mony.”

So much for that cardinal point, which  
the essayist labours so strenuously to e-  
vince; and which, if true, will not only  
be subversive of revelation, as receiv’d by  
us, on the testimony of the apostles, and  
prophets, and martyrs; but will directly  
lead to this general conclusion: ‘ That  
‘ it is impossible for God Almighty to

B

‘ give

give a revelation, attended with such evidence, that it can be reasonably believ'd in after-ages, or even in the same age, by any person who hath not been an eye-witness of the miracles, by which it is supported.

Now by what wonderful process of reasoning is this strange conclusion made out? Several topics have been employ'd for the purpose by this subtle-disputant. Among these there is one principal argument, which he is at great pains to set off, to the best advantage. Here indeed he claims a fatherly concern, having discover'd it himself. His title to the honour of the discovery, 'tis not my business to controvert; I confine myself entirely to the consideration of its importance. To this end I shall now lay before the reader, the unanswerable argument, as he flatters himself it will be found; taking the freedom, for  
brevity's

Sect. 1. PROOF FROM TESTIMONY. IF

brevity's sake, to compendize the reasoning, and to omit whatever is said merely for illustration. To do otherwise would lay us under the necessity of transcribing the greater part of the essay.

'Experience,' says he, 'is our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact.' Experience is in some things variable, in some things uniform. A variable experience gives rise only to probability; an uniform experience amounts to a proof †. Probability always supposes an opposition of experiments and observations, where the one side is found to overbalance the other, and to produce a degree of evidence proportion'd to the superiority. In such cases we must balance the opposite experiments, and deduct the lesser number from the greater, in order to know the exact force of the superior

\* p. 174.

† p. 175. 176.



'evidence'. Our belief or assurance of  
 'any fact from the report of eye-witnesses;  
 'is deriv'd from no other principle than  
 'experience; that is, our observation of  
 'the veracity of human testimony, and  
 'of the usual conformity of facts to the  
 'reports of witnesses. †. Now if the fact  
 'attested partakes of the marvellous, if it  
 'is such as has seldom fallen under our  
 'observation, here is a contest of two op-  
 'posite experiences, of which the one de-  
 'stroys the other, as far as its force goes,  
 'and the superior can only operate on the  
 'mind by the force which remains. The  
 'very same principle of experience, which  
 'gives us a certain degree of assurance,  
 'in the testimony of witnesses, gives us  
 'also, in this case, another degree of assu-  
 'rance, against the fact which they en-  
 'deavour to establish; from which con-  
 'tradiction, there necessarily arises a

\* p. 176.

† ib.

' counterpoise,

SECT. I. PROOF FROM TESTIMONY. 13

‘counterpoise, and mutual destruction of  
‘belief and authority\*. Further, if the  
‘fact affirmed by the witnesses, instead  
‘of being only marvellous, is really mi-  
‘raculous; if besides, the testimony con-  
‘sider’d apart and in itself, amounts to  
‘an entire proof; in that case there is  
‘proof against proof, of which the strong-  
‘est must prevail, but still with a dimi-  
‘nution of its force, in proportion to  
‘that of its antagonist. A miracle is a  
‘violation of the laws of nature; and as  
‘a firm and unalterable experience has e-  
‘stablished these laws, the proof against  
‘a miracle from the very nature of the  
‘fact, is as entire, as any argument from  
‘experience can possibly be imagined †.  
‘And if so, ’tis an undeniable conse-  
‘quence, that it cannot be surmounted  
‘by any proof whatever from testimony.  
‘A miracle therefore, however attested,

\* p. 179.

† p. 180.

‘ can



' can never be render'd credible, even in  
' the lowest degree.' This, in my ap-  
prehension, is the sum of the argument;  
on which our ingenious opponent rests the  
strength of his cause.

I N answer to this I propose first to  
prove that the whole is built upon a false  
hypothesis. That the evidence of testi-  
mony is derived solely from experience,  
which seems to be an axiom of this wri-  
ter, is at least not so incontestable a truth,  
as he supposes it; that, on the contrary,  
testimony hath a natural and original in-  
fluence on belief, antecedent to experience,  
will, I imagine, easily be evinced. For  
this purpose let it be remark'd, that the  
earliest assent, which is given to testimo-  
ny by children, and which is previous to  
all experience, is in fact the most unlimit-  
ed; that by a gradual experience of man-  
kind, it is gradually contracted, and re-  
duced

Sect. I. PROOF FROM TESTIMONY. 15

duced to narrower bounds. To say therefore that our diffidence in testimony is the result of experience, is more philosophical, because more consonant to truth, than to say that our faith in testimony has this foundation. Accordingly youth, which is unexperienc'd, is credulous; age, on the contrary, is distrustful. Exactly the reverse would be the case, were this author's doctrine just.

Perhaps it will be said, If experience is allowed to be the only measure of a logical or reasonable faith in testimony, the question, *Whether the influence of testimony on belief, be original or deriv'd?* if 'tis not merely verbal, is at least of no importance in the present controversy. Far otherwise. The difference between us is by no means so inconsiderable, as to a careless view it may appear. According to his philosophy, the presumption lies against the testimony, or (which amounts to

to the same thing) there is not the smallest presumption in its favour, till properly supported by experience. According to the explication given above, there lies the strongest presumption in favour of the testimony, till properly refuted by experience.

If it be objected by the author, that such a faith in testimony as is prior to experience, must be unreasonable and unphilosophical, because unaccountable; I should reply, that there are, and must be, in human nature, some original grounds of belief, beyond which our researches cannot proceed, and of which therefore 'tis vain to attempt a rational account. I should desire the objector to give a reasonable account of his faith in this principle, that *similar causes always produce similar effects*; or in this, that *the course of nature will be the same to-morrow, that it was yesterday, and is to-day*: principles, which he himself acknowledges,



Sect. I. PROOF FROM TESTIMONY. 17

ledges, are neither intuitively evident, nor deduced from premises; and which nevertheless we are under a necessity of presupposing, in all our reasonings from experience\*. I should desire him to give a reasonable account of his faith in the clearest informations of his memory, which he will find it alike impossible either to doubt, or to explain. Indeed memory bears nearly the same relation to experience, that testimony does. Certain it is that the defects and misrepresentations of memory are often corrected by experience. Yet should any person hence infer, that memory derives all its evidence from experience, he would fall into a manifest absurdity. On the contrary, experience derives its origin solely from memory, and is nothing else but the general maxims or conclusions, we have form'd, from the comparision of particular facts remem-

\* Sceptical doubts. Part 2.

ber'd. If we had not previously given an implicit faith to memory, we had never been able to acquire experience. When therefore we say that memory, which gives birth to experience, may nevertheless in some instances be corrected by experience, no more is imply'd, but that the inferences form'd from the most lively and perspicuous reports of memory, sometimes serve to rectify the mistakes which arise from such reports of this faculty, as are most languid and confus'd. Thus memory, in these instances, may be said to correct itself. The case is often much the same with experience and testimony, as will appear more clearly in the second section, where I shall consider the ambiguity of the word *experience*, as us'd by this author.

BUT how, says Mr Hume, is testimony then to be refuted? Principally in one

or



SECT. I. PROOF FROM TESTIMONY. 19

or other of these two ways: *first* and most directly by contradictory testimony; that is, when an equal or greater number of witnesses, equally or more credible, attest the contrary: *secondly*, by such evidence either of the incapacity or baseness of the witnesses, as is sufficient to discredit them. What, rejoins my antagonist, cannot then testimony be confuted by the extraordinary nature of the fact attested? Has this consideration no weight at all? That this consideration hath no weight at all, 'twas never my intention to maintain; that by itself it can very rarely, if ever, amount to a refutation against ample and unexceptionable testimony, I hope to make extremely plain. Who hath ever denied, that the uncommonness of an event related, is a presumption against its reality; and that chiefly on account of the tendency, which, experience teacheth us, and this author hath observed, some people

have to sacrifice truth to the love of wonder \*? The question only is, How far does this presumption extend? In the extent which Mr Hume hath assign'd it, he hath greatly exceeded the limits of nature, and consequently of all just reasoning.

- In his opinion, " When the fact attest-  
 " ed is such as has seldom fallen under  
 " our observation, there is a contest of  
 " two opposite experiences, of which the  
 " one destroys the other, as far as its force  
 " goes, and the superior can only operate  
 " on the mind, by the force which re-  
 " mains †." There is a metaphysical, I  
 had almost said, a magical *balance* and *arithmetic*, for the weighing and subtracting of evidence, which he frequently recurs to, and with which he seems to fancy he could perform wonders. I wish he had been a little more explicit in teaching us how these rare inventions must be us'd.

\* p. 184.

† p. 179.

When

When a writer of genius and elocution expresses himself in general terms, he will find it an easy matter, to give a plausible appearance to things the most unintelligible in nature. Such sometimes is this author's way of writing. To a superficial view his argument appears scarce inferior to demonstration, but when narrowly canvass'd, 'tis impracticable to find an application, of which, in a consistency with truth and reason, it is capable.

In confirmation of the remark just now made, let us try how his manner of arguing on this point can be applied to a particular instance. For this purpose I make the following supposition. I have liv'd for some years near a ferry. It consists with my knowledge that the passage-boat has a thousand times crossed the river, and as many times return'd safe. An unknown man, whom I have just now met, tells me in a serious manner, that it

is



is lost; and affirms, that he himself standing on the bank, was a spectator of the scene; that he saw the passengers carried down the stream, and the boat overwhelm'd and dash'd to pieces. No person, who is influenced in his judgment of things, not by philosophical subtilties, but by common sense, a much surer guide, will hesitate to declare, that in such a testimony I have probable evidence of the fact asserted. But if leaving common sense, I shall recur to metaphysics, and submit to be tutor'd in my way of judging by the essayist, he will remind me, "that there is here a contest of two opposite experiences, of which the one destroys the other, as far as its force goes, and the superior can only operate on the mind by the force which remains." I am warn'd, that "the very same principle of experience, which gives me a certain degree of assurance in the testimony  
 " many

“mony of the witness, gives me also, in  
 “this case, another degree of assurance,  
 “against the fact, which he endeavours  
 “to establish, from which contradiction  
 “there arises a counterpoise, and mutual  
 “destruction of belief and authority \*.”

Well, I would know the truth, if possible;  
 and that I may conclude fairly and philo-  
 sophically, how must I balance these op-  
 posite experiences, as you are pleas'd to  
 term them? Must I set the thousand, or  
 rather the two thousand instances of the  
 one side, against the single instance of the  
 other? In that case, 'tis easy to see, I  
 have nineteen hundred and ninety-nine de-  
 grees of evidence, that my information is  
 false. Or is it necessary, in order to make  
 it credible, that the single instance have  
 two thousand times as much evidence, as  
 any of the opposite instances, supposing  
 them equal among themselves; or suppo-



sing them unequal, as much as all the two  
 thousand put together, that there may be  
 at least an equilibrium? This is impos-  
 sible. I had for some of those instances,  
 the evidence of sense, which hardly any  
 testimony can equal, much less exceed.  
 Once more, must the evidence I have of  
 the veracity of the witness, be a full equi-  
 valent to the two thousand instances,  
 which oppose the fact attested? By the  
 supposition, I have no positive evidence for  
 or against his veracity, he being a person  
 whom I never saw before. Yet if none of  
 these be the balancing, which the essay-  
 writer means, I despair of being able to  
 discover his meaning.

Is then so weak a proof from testimony  
 incapable of being refuted? I am far from  
 thinking so; tho' even so weak a proof  
 could not be overturn'd by such a contrary  
 experience. How then may it be over-  
 turn'd? *First*, by contradictory testimony.

Going

Going homewards I meet another person, whom I know as little as I did the former; finding that he comes from the ferry, I ask him concerning the truth of the report. He affirms, that the whole is a fiction; that he saw the boat, and all in it, come safe to land. This would do more to turn the scale, than fifty thousand such contrary instances, as were suppos'd. Yet this wou'd not entirely remove suspicion. Afterward a third, and a fourth, and a fifth, confirm the declaration of the second. I shall then be quite at ease. Is this the only effectual way of confuting false testimony? No. I suppose *again*, that instead of meeting with any person who can inform me concerning the fact, I get from some, who are acquainted with the witness, information concerning his character. They tell me, he is notorious for lying; and that his lies are commonly forged, not with a view to interest, but

D

merely

merely to gratify a malicious pleasure, which he takes in alarming strangers. This, tho' not so direct a refutation as the former, will be sufficient to discredit his report. In the former, where there is testimony contradicting testimony, the author's metaphor of a balance may be us'd with propriety. The things weigh'd are homogeneal: and when contradictory evidences are presented to the mind, tending to prove positions which cannot be both true, the mind must decide on the comparative strength of the opposite evidences, before it yield to either.

But is this the case in the supposition first made? By no means. The two thousand instances formerly known, and the single instance attested, as they relate to different facts, tho' of a contrary nature, are not contradictory. There is no inconsistency in believing both. There is no inconsistency in receiving the last on  
weaker



weaker evidence, (if it be sufficient evidence) not only than all the former together, but even than any of them singly. Will it be said, that tho' the former instances are not themselves contradictory to the fact recently attested, they lead to a conclusion that is contradictory? I answer, 'Tis true, that the experienced frequency of the conjunction of any two events, leads the mind to infer a similar conjunction in time to come. But let it at the same time be remark'd, that no man considers this inference, as having equal evidence with any one of those past events, on which it is founded, and for the belief of which we have had sufficient testimony. Before then the method recommended by this author can turn to any account, it will be necessary for him to compute and determine with precision, how many hundreds, how many thousands, I might say how many myriads of instances,



instances, will confer such evidence on the conclusion founded on them, as will prove an equipoise for the testimony of one or several witnesses, a man of probity, in a case of which he is allow'd to be a competent judge.

There is in *arithmetic* a rule called REDUCTION, by which numbers of different denominations are brought to the same denomination. If this ingenious author shall invent a rule in *logic*, analogous to this, for reducing different classes of evidence to the same class, he will bless the world with a most important discovery. Then indeed he will have the honour to establish an everlasting peace in the republic of letters; then we shall have the happiness to see controversy of every kind, theological, historical, philosophical, receive its mortal wound: for though, in every question, we could not even then determine with certainty, on which side the

truth

truth lay, we could always determine (and that is the utmost the nature of the thing admits) with as much accuracy as geometry and algebra can afford, on which side the probability lay, and in what degree. But till this metaphysical *reduction* is discover'd, 'twill be impossible, where the evidences are of different orders, to ascertain by *subtraction* the superior evidence. We could not but esteem him a blunderer in arithmetic, who being asked, whether seven pounds or eleven pence make the greater sum, and what is the difference? should, by attending solely to the numbers, and overlooking the value, conclude that eleven pence were the greater, and that it exceeded the other by four. Must we not be equal novices in reasoning, if we follow the same absurd method? Must we not fall into as great blunders? Of as little significance do we find the balance. Is the value of things heterogeneous

to

to be determin'd merely by weight? Shall silver be weighed against lead, or copper against iron? If in exchange for a piece of gold, I were offer'd some counters of baser metal, is it not obvious, that till I know the comparative value of the metals, in vain shall I attempt to find what is equivalent, by the assistance either of scales or arithmetic?

"Tis an excellent observation, and much to the purpose, which the late learned and pious Bishop of Durham, in his admirable performance on the analogy of religion to the course of nature, hath made on this subject. "There is a very strong presumption," says he, "against the most ordinary facts, before the proof of them, which yet is overcome by almost any proof. There is a presumption of millions to one against the story of Cæsar, or of any other man. For suppose a number  
"ber



Sect. 1. PROOF FROM TESTIMONY. 31

“ber of common facts, so and so circum-  
“stanced, of which one had no kind of  
“proof, should happen to come into one’s  
“thoughts, every one would, without a-  
“ny possible doubt, conclude them to be  
“false. The like may be said of a single  
“common fact\*.” What then, I may  
subjoin, shall be said of an uncommon  
fact? In order to illustrate the observation  
above cited, suppose, first, one at random  
mentions, that at such an hour, of such a  
day, in such a part of the heavens, a co-  
met *will* appear; the conclusion from ex-  
perience would not be as millions, but as  
infinite to one, that the proposition is false.  
Instead of this, suppose you have the testi-  
mony of but one man of integrity, who is  
skill’d in astronomy, that at such an hour,  
of such a day, in such a part of the hea-  
vens, a comet *did* appear; you will not  
hesitate one moment to give him credit.

Part 2. chap. 2. § 3.

Yet



Yet all the presumption that was against the truth of the first supposition, tho' almost as strong evidence as experience can afford, was also against the truth of the second, before it was thus attested. Is it necessary to urge further, in support of this doctrine, that as the water in the canal cannot be made to rise higher than the fountain whence it flows; so it is impossible, that the evidence of testimony, if it proceeded from experience, should ever exceed that of experience, which is its source? Yet that it greatly exceeds this evidence, appears not only from what hath been observ'd already, but still more, from what I shall have occasion to observe in the sequel. One may safely affirm, that no conceivable conclusion from experience, can possess stronger evidence, than that which ascertains us of the regular succession and duration of day and night. The reason is,

is, the instances on which this experience is founded, are both without number and without exception. Yet even this conclusion, the author admits, as we shall see in the third section, may, in a particular instance, not only be surmounted, but even annihilated by testimony.

Lastly, let it be observed, that the immediate conclusion from experience is always *general*, and runs thus: 'This is the ordinary course of nature.' 'Such an event may reasonably be expected, where all the circumstances are entirely similar.' But when we descend to particulars, the conclusion becomes weaker, being more indirect. For though all the *known* circumstances be similar, all the *actual* circumstances may not be similar: nor is it possible in any case to be assur'd (our knowledge of things being at best but superficial) that all the *actual* circumstances are *known* to us. On  
 E the

the contrary, the direct conclusion from testimony is always *particular*, and runs thus : ' This is the fact in such an ' individual instance.' The remark now made will serve both to throw light on some of the preceding observations, and to indicate the proper sphere of each species of evidence. *Experience* of the past is the only rule whereby we can judge concerning the *future* : And as when the sun is below the horizon, we must do the best we can by the light of the moon, or even of the stars; so in all cases where we have no testimony, we are under a necessity of recurring to experience, and of balancing or numbering contrary observations\*. But the evidence

\* Where-ever such balancing or numbering can take place, the opposite evidences must be entirely similar. It will rarely assist us in judging of facts supported by testimony : for even where contradictory testimonies come to be considered, you will hardly find, that the characters of the witnesses on the opposite sides are so precisely equal, as that an arithmetical operation

shall



evidence resulting hence, even in the clearest cases, is acknowledged to be so weak, compar'd with that which results from te-

shall evolve the credibility. In matters of pure experience it hath often place. Hence the computations that have been made of the value of annuities, insurances, and several other commercial articles. In calculations concerning chances, the degree of probability may be determin'd with mathematical exactness. I shall here take the liberty, tho' the matter be not essential to the design of this tract, to correct an oversight in the essayist, who always supposes, that where contrary evidences must be balanced, the probability lies in the remainder or surplus, when the less number is subtracted from the greater. The probability doth not consist in the surplus, but in the ratio, or geometrical proportion, which the numbers on the opposite sides bear to each other. I explain myself thus. In favour of one suppos'd event, there are 100 similar instances, against it 50. In another case under consideration, the favourable instances are 60, and only 10 unfavourable. Tho' the difference, or arithmetical proportion, which is 50, be the same in both cases, the probability is by no means equal, as the author's way of reasoning implies. The probability of the first event is as 100 to 50, or 2 to 1. The probability of the second is as 60 to 10, or 6 to 1. Consequently on comparing the different examples, tho' both be probable, the second is thrice as probable as the first.



stimony, that the strongest conviction built merely on the former, may be overturn'd by the slightest proof exhibited by the latter. Accordingly the future hath, in all ages and nations, been denominated the province of conjecture and uncertainty.

THUS I have shown, as I propos'd, that the author's reasoning proceeds on a false hypothesis. — It supposeth testimony to derive its evidence solely from experience, which is false. — It supposeth by consequence, that contrary observations have a weight in opposing testimony, which the first and most acknowledged principles of human reason, or, if you like the term better, common sense, evidently shows that they have not. — It assigns a rule for discovering the superiority of contrary evidences, which, in the latitude there given it, tends to mislead the judgment, and  
which

which 'tis impossible, by any explication, to render of real use.

## SECTION II.

*Mr Hume charged with some fallacies in his way of managing the argument.*

IN the essay there is frequent mention of the word *experience*, and much use every where made of it. 'Tis strange that the author hath not favour'd us with the definition of a term, of so much moment to his argument. This defect I shall endeavour to supply ; and the rather, as the word appears to be equivocal, and to be us'd by the essayist in two very different senses. The first and most proper signification of the word, which, for distinction's sake, I shall call *personal* experience, is that given in the preceding section. ' It ' is,' as was observ'd, ' founded in *memory*, and consists solely of the general maxims

‘ xims or conclusions, that each individual  
 ‘ hath form’d, from the comparison of  
 ‘ the particular facts he hath remem-  
 ‘ ber’d.’ In the other signification, in  
 which the word is sometimes taken, and  
 which I shall distinguish by the term *de-*  
*riv’d*, it may be thus defin’d. ‘ It is  
 ‘ founded in *testimony*, and consists not on-  
 ‘ ly of all the experiences of others, which  
 ‘ have thro’ that channel been communi-  
 ‘ cated to us, but of all the general ma-  
 ‘ xims or conclusions we have form’d, from  
 ‘ the comparison of particular facts attest-  
 ‘ ed.’

In proposing his argument, the author  
 would surely be understood to mean only  
*personal* experience; otherwise, his making  
 testimony derive its light from an expe-  
 rience which derives its light from testimo-  
 ny, would be introducing what logicians  
 term a *circle in causes*. It would exhibit  
 the same things alternately, as causes and  
 effects



effects of each other. Yet nothing can be more limited, than the sense which is convey'd under the term *experience*, in the first acceptation. The merest clown or peasant derives incomparably more knowledge from testimony, and the communicated experience of others, than in the longest life he could have amassed out of the treasure of his own memory. Nay, to such a scanty portion the savage himself is not confin'd. If that therefore must be the rule, the only rule, by which every testimony is ultimately to be judged, our belief in matters of fact must have very narrow bounds. No testimony ought to have any weight with us, that doth not relate an event, similar at least to some one observation, which we ourselves have had access to make. For example, that there are such people on the earth as negroes, could not, on that hypothesis, be render'd credible to one who had never seen a negro, not even



even by the most numerous and the most unexceptionable attestations. Against the admission of such testimony, however strong, the whole force of the author's argument evidently strikes. But that innumerable absurdities would flow from this principle, I might easily evince, did I not think the task superfluous.

The author himself is aware of the consequences; and therefore, in whatever sense he uses the term *experience* in proposing his argument; in prosecuting it, he with great dexterity shifts the sense, and ere the reader is apprised, insinuates another. " 'Tis a miracle," says he, " that  
 " a dead man should come to life, be-  
 " cause that has never been observ'd in a-  
 " ny age or country. There must there-  
 " fore be an uniform experience against  
 " every miraculous event, otherwise the  
 " event would not merit that appella-  
 " tion

"tion\*." Here the phrase, *an uniform experience against an event*, in the latter clause, is implicitly defin'd in the former, not what has never been observ'd BY US, but (mark his words) *what has never been observ'd IN ANY AGE OR COUNTRY*. Now, what has been observ'd, and what has not been observ'd, in all ages and countries, pray how can you, Sir, or I, or any man, come to the knowledge of? Only I suppose by testimony, oral or written. The personal experience of every individual is limited to but a part of one age, and commonly to a narrow spot of one country. If there be any other way of being made acquainted with facts, 'tis to me, I own, an impenetrable secret; I have no apprehension of it. If there be not any, what shall we make of that cardinal point, on which his argument turns? 'Tis in plain language, 'Testimony is not intitled to the least de-

\* p. 181.

‘gree of faith, but as far as it is support-  
 ‘ed by such an extensive experience, as if  
 ‘we had not had a previous and indepen-  
 ‘dent faith in testimony, we could never  
 ‘have acquir’d.’

How natural is the transition from one  
 sophism to another! You will soon be con-  
 vinced of this, if you but attend a little to  
 the strain of the argument. “A miracle,”  
 says he, “is a violation of the laws of na-  
 “ture; and as a firm and unalterable ex-  
 “perience hath established these laws, the  
 “proof against a miracle is as entire, as  
 “any argument from experience can pos-  
 “sibly be imagined \*.” Again, “As an  
 “uniform experience amounts to a proof,  
 “there is here a direct and full proof,  
 “from the nature of the fact, against the  
 “existence of any miracle †.” I must  
 once more ask the author, What is the

\* p. 180.

† p. 181.



precise meaning of the words *firm, unalterable, uniform*? An experience that admits no exception, is surely the only experience, which can with propriety be term'd *uniform, firm, unalterable*. Now since, as was remark'd above, the far greater part of this experience, which compriseth every age and every country, must be deriv'd to us from testimony; that the experience may be *firm, uniform, unalterable*, there must be no contrary testimony whatever. Yet by the author's own hypothesis, the miracles he would thus confute, are supported by testimony. At the same time to give strength to his argument, he is under a necessity of supposing, that there is no exception from the testimonies against them. Thus he falls into that paralogism, which is called *begging the question*. What he gives with one hand, he takes with the other. He admits, in opening his

design, what in his argument he implicitly denies.

But that this, if possible, may be still more manifest, let us attend a little to some expressions, which one would imagine he had inadvertently dropt: "So long," says he, "as the world endures, I presume, will the accounts of miracles and prodigies be found in all profane history \*." Why does he presume so? A man so much attach'd to experience, can hardly be suspected to have any other reason than this; because such accounts have hitherto been found in all the histories, profane as well as sacred, of times past. But we need not recur to an inference to obtain this acknowledgment. It is often to be met with in the essay. In one place we learn, that the witnesses for miracles are an infinite number †; in another, that all religious records of what-

\* p. 174.

† p. 190.

Sect. 2. PROOF FROM TESTIMONY. 45

ever kind abound with them \*. I leave it therefore to the author to explain, with what consistency he can assert, that the laws of nature are establish'd by an uniform experience, (which experience is chiefly the result of testimony) and at the same time allow, that almost all human histories are full of the relations of miracles and prodigies, which are violations of those laws. Here is, by his own confession, testimony against testimony, and very ample on both sides. How then can one side claim a firm, uniform, and unalterable support from testimony?

It will be in vain to object, that the testimony for the laws of nature greatly exceeds the testimony for the violations; and that, if we are to be determin'd by the greater number of observations, we shall reject all miracles whatever. I ask, Why are the testimonies much more numerous in the one case than in the other? The answer is obvious: Natural occurrences are

\* p. 191.

much



much more frequent than such as are preternatural. But are all the accounts we have of the pestilence to be rejected as incredible, because, in this country, we hear not so often of that disease, as of the fever? Or, because the number of natural births is infinitely greater than that of monsters, shall the evidence of the former be regarded as a confutation of all that can be advanced in proof of the latter? Such an objector needs to be reminded of what was prov'd in the foregoing section; that the opposite testimonies relaté to different facts, and are therefore not contradictory; that the conclusion founded on them, possesseth not the evidence of the facts on which it is founded, but only such a presumptive evidence, as may be surmounted by the slightest positive proof. A general conclusion from experience is in comparison but presumptive and indirect; sufficient testimony for a particular fact is direct and positive evidence.

I SHALL remark one other fallacy in this author's reasoning, before I conclude this section. "The Indian prince," says he, "who refus'd to believe the first relations concerning the effects of frost, reasoned justly; and it naturally required very strong testimony to engage his assent to facts, which arose from a state of nature, with which he was unacquainted, and bore so little analogy to those events, of which he had had constant and uniform experience. Tho' they were not contrary to his experience, they were not conformable to it\*." Here a distinction is artfully suggested, between what is *contrary* to experience, and what is *not conformable* to it. The one he allows may be prov'd by testimony, but not the other. A distinction, for which the author seems to have so great use, it will not be improper to examine.

\* P. 179.

If

If my reader happen to be but little acquainted with Mr Hume's writings, or even with the piece here examin'd, I must intreat him, ere he proceed any farther, to give the essay an attentive perusal; and to take notice particularly, whether in one single passage, he can find any other sense given to the terms *contrary to experience*, but that which has *not* been *experienced*. Without this aid, I should not be surpris'd, that I found it difficult to convince the judicious, that a man of so much acuteness, one so much a philosopher as this author, should, with such formality, make a distinction, which not only the essay, but the whole tenour of his philosophical writings shows evidently to have no meaning. Is that which is contrary to experience a synonymous phrase for that which implies a contradiction? If this were the case, there would be no need to recur to experience for a refutation; it would refute itself,



self. But 'tis equitable that the author himself be heard, who ought to be the best interpreter of his own words. "When the fact attested," says he, "is such a one, as has seldom fallen under our observation, here is a contest of two opposite experiences \*." In this passage, not the being *never* experienced, but even the being *seldom* experienced, constitutes an *opposite* experience. I can conceive no way but one, that the author can evade the force of this quotation; and that is, by obtruding on us, some new distinction between an *opposite* and a *contrary* experience. In order to preclude such an attempt, I shall once more recur to his own authority. "'Tis no miracle that a man in seeming good health, should die of a sudden." Why? "Because such a kind of death, tho' more unusual than any other, hath yet been frequently observ'd to

\* P. 179.

“ happen. But 'tis a miracle that a dead  
 “ man should come to life.” Why? Not  
 because of any inconsistency in the thing.  
 That a body should be this hour in-  
 animate, and the next animated, is no  
 more inconsistent, than the reverse, that  
 it should be this hour animated, and the  
 next inanimate; though the one be com-  
 mon, and not the other. But the author  
 himself answers the question: “ Because  
 “ that has never been observ'd in any age  
 “ or country\*.” All the contrariety then  
 that there is in miracles to experience,  
 doth, by his own concession, consist solely  
 in this, that they have never been observ'd;  
 that is, they are not conformable to expe-  
 rience. To our experience personal or de-  
 riv'd he must certainly mean; to what we  
 have had access to learn of different ages  
 and countries. To speak beyond the  
 knowledge we have attain'd, would be ri-

\* p. 181.

Sect. 2. PROOF FROM TESTIMONY. 51

diculous. It would be first supposing a miracle, and then inferring a contrary experience, instead of concluding from experience, that the fact is miraculous.

Now I insist, that as far as regards the author's argument, a fact perfectly unusual, or not conformable to our experience, such as, for aught we have had access to learn, was never observ'd in any age or country, is as incapable of proof from testimony, as miracles are; that, if this writer would argue consistently, he could never, on his own principles, reject the one, and admit the other. Both ought to be rejected, or neither. I would not, by this, be thought to signify, that there is no difference between a miracle and an extraordinary event. I know that the former implies the interposal of an invisible agent, which is not implied in the latter. All that I intend to assert, is, that the author's argument strikes equally a-



gainst both. Why doth such interposal appear to him incredible? Not from any incongruity he discerns in the thing itself. He doth not pretend it. But 'tis not conformable to his experience. "A miracle," says he, "is a transgression of a law of nature \*." But how are the laws of nature known to us? By experience. What is the criterion, whereby we must judge, whether the laws of nature are transgressed? Solely the conformity or disconformity of events to our experience. This writer surely will not pretend, that we can have any knowledge *a priori*, either of the law, or the violation.

Let us then examine by his own principles, whether the King of Siam, of whom the story he alludes to, is related by Locket†, could have sufficient evidence, from testimony, of a fact so contrary to his experience, as the freezing of water. He

\* p. 182. in the note.

† Essay on human understanding, book 4. chap. 15. § 5.

could

could just say as much of this event, as  
 the author can say of a dead man's being  
 restor'd to life. 'Such a thing was never  
 observ'd, as far as I could learn, in any  
 age or country.' If the things them-  
 selves too are impartially consider'd, and  
 independently of the notions acquir'd by  
 us in these northern climates, we should  
 account the first at least as extraordinary  
 as the second. That so pliant a body as  
 water should become hard like pavement,  
 so as to bear up an elephant on its surface,  
 is as unlikely in itself, as that a body ina-  
 nimate to-day, should be animated to-  
 morrow. Nay to the Indian monarch, I  
 must think, that the first wou'd appear  
 more a miracle, more contrary to expe-  
 rience, than the second. If he had been  
 acquainted with ice or frozen water, and  
 afterward seen it become fluid, but had  
 never seen nor learn'd, that after it was  
 melted, it became hard again, the rela-  
 tion

tion must have appeared marvellous, as the process from fluidity to hardness never had been experienced, tho' the reverse often had. But I believe nobody will question, that on this supposition it would not have appeared quite so strange, as it did. Yet this supposition makes the instance more parallel to the restoring of the dead to life. The process from animate to inanimate we are all acquainted with; and what is such a restoration, but the reversing of this process? So little reason had the author to insinuate, that the one was only *not conformable*, the other *contrary* to experience. If there be a difference in this respect, the first, to one alike unacquainted with both, must appear the more contrary of the two.

Does it alter the matter, that he calls the former "a fact which arose from a state of nature, with which the Indian was unacquainted?" Was not such a state



state quite unconformable, or (which in the author's language I have shown to be the same) contrary to his experience? Is then a state of nature which is contrary to experience, more credible than a single fact contrary to experience? I want the solution of one difficulty: The author, in order to satisfy me, presents me with a thousand others. Is this suitable to the method he proposes in another place, of admitting always the less miracle, and rejecting the greater\*? Is it not, on the contrary, admitting without any difficulty the greater miracle, and thereby removing the difficulty, which he otherwise wou'd have had in admitting the less? Does he forget, that the exhibiting a state of nature entirely different from what we experience at present, is one of those enormous prodigies, which, in his account, render the Pentateuch so unworthy of credit †? "No

\* p. 182. † p. 206.

"Indian,"

"Indian," says he in the note, "is testi-  
 "fied, 'tw'd have experience that water  
 "did not freeze in cold climates. This  
 "is placing nature in a situation quite un-  
 "known to him, and 'tis impossible for  
 "him to tell *a priori*, what will result  
 "from it." This is precisely as if in re-  
 ply to the author's objection from experi-  
 ence against the raising of a dead man, (sup-  
 pose Lazarus) to life, I should retort, 'Nei-  
 "ther you, Sir, nor any who live in this  
 "century can have experience, that a dead  
 "man could not be restor'd to life at the  
 "command of one divinely commission'd  
 "to give a revelation to men. This is  
 "placing nature in a situation quite un-  
 "known to you, and 'tis impossible for  
 "you to tell *a priori*, what will result from  
 "it. This therefore is not contrary to  
 "the course of nature, in cases where all  
 "the circumstances are the same. As you  
 "never in your lifetime saw one vested  
 ' with

Sect. 2. PROOF FROM TESTIMONY. 57

‘ with such a commission, you are as un-  
‘ experienced, as ignorant on this point,  
‘ as the inhabitants of Sumatra are of the  
‘ frosts in Muscovy; you cannot there-  
‘ fore reasonably, any more than they,  
‘ be positive as to the consequences.’  
Should he rejoin, as doubtless he would,  
‘ This is not taking away the difficulty;  
‘ but, like the elephant and the tortoise, in  
‘ the account given by some barbarians  
‘ of the manner in which the earth is sup-  
‘ ported, it only shifts the difficulty a step  
‘ further back. My objection still recurs.  
‘ That any man should be endow’d with  
‘ such power is contrary to experience,  
‘ and therefore incredible:’ Should he, I  
say, rejoin in this manner, I could only  
add, ‘ Pray, Sir, revise your own words  
‘ lately quoted, and consider impartially  
‘ whether they be not as glaringly expos’d  
‘ to the like reply.’ For my part, I can  
only perceive one difference that is mate-

H

rial



rial between the two cases. You frankly confess, that with regard to the freezing of water, besides the absolute want of experience, there would be from analogy a presumption against it, which ought to weigh with a rational Indian. I think, on the contrary, in the case suppos'd by me, of one commission'd by Heaven, there is at least no presumption against the exertion of such a miraculous power. There is rather a presumption in its favour.

Does the author then say, that no testimony could give the King of Siam sufficient evidence of the effects of cold on water? No. By implication he says the contrary: "It required very strong testimony." Will he say, that those most astonishing effects of electricity lately discover'd, so entirely unanalogous to every thing before experienced, will he say, that such facts no reasonable man could have sufficient evidence from testimony to believe? No.

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No. We may presume, he will not, from his decision in the former case; and if he should, the common sense of mankind would reclaim against his extravagance. Yet is obvious to every considerate reader, that his argument strikes equally against those truly marvellous, as against miraculous events, both being alike unconformable, or alike contrary to former experience.

Thus Does the author then say, that no testimony can be admitted in its favour. I cannot forbear to observe, that many of the principal terms employ'd in the essay are us'd in a manner extremely vague and unphilosophical. I have remark'd the confusion I find in the application of the words, *experience*, *contrariety*, *conformity*. I might remark the same thing of the word, *miracles*. "A miracle," 'tis said, p. 182. in the note, "may be accurately defin'd. A TRANSGRESSION of a law of nature, by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent." The word *transgression* invariably denotes a criminal opposition to authority. The author's accuracy in representing God as a transgressor, I have not indeed the perspicacity to discern. Does he intend, by throwing something monstrous into the definition, to infuse into the reader

THUS I think I have shown, that the author is chargeable with some fallacies, in his way of managing the argument; — that he all along avails himself of an ambiguity in the word *experience*; — that

er a prejudice against the thing defin'd? But supposing that thro' inadvertency, he had us'd the term *transgression*, instead of *suspension*, which would have been both intelligible and proper; one would at least expect, that the word *miracle* in the essay, always express the sense of the definition. But this it evidently does not. Thus in the instance of the miracle suppos'd (p. 203. in the note) he calls it, in the beginning of the paragraph, "A violation of the usual course of nature;" but in the end, after telling us that such a miracle, on the evidence suppos'd, "our present philosophers ought to receive for certain," he subjoins, (how consistently, let the reader judge) "and ought to search for the causes, whence it might be deriv'd." Thus it is insinuated, that tho' a fact apparently miraculous, and perfectly extraordinary, might be admitted by a philosopher, still the reality of the miracle must be denied. For if the interposal of the Deity be the proper solution of the phenomenon, why recur to natural causes? Hence a careless reader is insensibly led to think, that there is some special incredibility in such an interposal, distinct from its uncommonness.

Yet



that his reasoning includes a *petitio principii* in the bosom of it;—and that, in supporting his argument, he must have recourse to distinctions, where, even himself being judge, there is no difference.

### SECTION III.

*Mr Hume himself gives up his favourite argument.*

‘MR Hume himself,’ methinks I hear my reader repeating with astonishment, ‘gives up his favourite argument! To prove this point is indeed a very bold attempt.’ Yet that this attempt is not al-

Yet the author’s great argument is built on that single circumstance, and places such an interposition just on the same footing with every event that is equally uncommon. At one time, he uses the word *miracle* to denote a *bare improbability*, as will appear in the sixth section: at another, *absurd* and *miraculous* are, with him, synonymous terms; so are also the *miraculous nature* of an event, and its *absolute impossibility*. Is this the style of a reasoner, or of a declaimer?

together

together so arduous, as at first hearing, he will possibly imagine, I hope, if favoured a while with his attention, fully to convince him. If to acknowledge, after all, that there may be miracles, which admit of proof from human testimony; if to acknowledge, that such miracles ought to be receiv'd, not as probable only, but as absolutely certain; or, in other words, that the proof from human testimony may be such, as that all the contrary uniform experience, should not only be overbalanced, but, to use the author's expression, should be annihilated; if such acknowledgments as these, are subversive of his own principles, if by making them, he abandons his darling argument, in this strange part the essayist evidently acts.

“I own,” these are his words, “there  
 “ may possibly be miracles, or violations  
 “ of the usual course of nature, of such a  
 “ kind as to admit of proof from human  
 “ testimony,

"testimony, tho' perhaps" (in this he is mo-  
 dest enough, he avers nothing; perhaps)  
 "it will be impossible to find any such in  
 "all the records of history." To this de-  
 claration he subjoins the following suppo-  
 sition: "Suppose all authors, in all lan-  
 "guages, agree, that from the 1st of Ja-  
 "nuary 1600, there was a total darkness  
 "over the whole earth for eight days;  
 "suppose that the tradition of this extra-  
 "ordinary event, is still strong and lively  
 "among the people; that all travellers,  
 "who return from foreign countries,  
 "bring us accounts of the same tradition,  
 "without the least variation or contradic-  
 "tion: it is evident, that our present philo-  
 "sophers, instead of doubting of that  
 "fact, ought to receive it for certain, and  
 "ought to search for the causes, whence  
 "it might be deriv'd \*."

Could one imagine, that the person who  
 p. 263. in the note

had

had



had made the above acknowledgment, a person too who is justly allow'd by all who are acquainted with his writings, to possess uncommon penetration and philosophical abilities, that this were the same individual, who had so short while before affirm'd, that "a miracle," or a violation of the usual course of nature, "supported by any human testimony, is more properly a subject of derision than of argument \*;" who had insisted, that "it is not requisite, in order to reject the fact, to be able accurately to disprove the testimony, and to trace its falsehood; that such an evidence carries falsehood on the very face of it †;" that "we need but oppose even to a cloud of witnesses, the absolute impossibility, or," which is all one, "miraculous nature of the events, which they relate; that this in the eyes of all reasonable people, will alone be

\* p. 194.

† ib.

" regarded

Sect. 3. PROOF FROM TESTIMONY. 65

"regarded as a sufficient refutation \*;" and who finally to put an end to all altercation on the subject, had pronounced this *oracle*. "NO TESTIMONY FOR ANY KIND OF MIRACLE CAN EVER POSSIBLY AMOUNT TO A PROBABILITY, MUCH LESS TO A PROOF †." Was there ever a more glaring contradiction?

YET for the event suppos'd by the essayist, the testimony, in his judgment, would amount to a *probability*; nay to more than a probability, to a *proof*; let not the reader be astonish'd, or if he cannot fail to be astonish'd, let him not be incredulous, when I add, to more than a *proof*, more than a full, entire, and direct proof; for even this I hope to make evident from the author's principles and reasoning. "And even supposing," says he, that is, granting for argument's sake,

\* p. 196. &c. † p. 202.

I

"that

" that the testimony for a miracle a-  
 " mounted to a proof, 'twould be oppos'd  
 " by another proof, deriv'd from the very  
 " nature of the fact, which it would en-  
 " deavour to establish \*." Here is then,  
 by his own reasoning, proof against proof,  
 from which there could result no belief or  
 opinion, unless the one is conceiv'd to be  
 in some degree superior to the other. " Of  
 " which proofs," says he, " the strongest  
 " must prevail, but still with a diminu-  
 " tion of its force, in proportion to that  
 " of its antagonist †." Before the author  
 could believe such a miracle as he suppo-  
 ses, he must at least be satisfied, that the  
 proof of it from testimony is stronger than  
 the proof against it from experience. That  
 we may form an accurate judgment of the  
 strength he here imputes to testimony,  
 let us consider what, by his own account,  
 is the strength of the opposite proof from

\* p. 202.

† p. 180.

experience.



Sect. 3. PROOF FROM TESTIMONY. 67

experience. "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature, and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire, as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined\*." Again, "As an uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a *direct* and *full* proof, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle†. The proof then which the essayist admits from testimony, is, by his own estimate, not only superior to a *direct* and *full* proof; but even superior to as *entire* a proof, as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. Whence, I pray, doth testimony acquire such amazing evidence? "Testimony," says the author, "hath no evidence, but what it derives from experience. These differ

\* p. 180.

† p. 181.

‘from each other only as the species from the genus.’ Put then for *testimony*, the word *experience*, which in this case is equivalent, and the conclusion will run thus: *Here is a proof from experience, which is superior to as entire a proof from experience, as can possibly be imagin’d.* This deduction from the author’s words, the reader will perceive, is strictly logical. What the meaning of it is, I leave to himself to explain.

What hath been above deduced, how much soever it be accounted, is not all that is implied in the concession made by the author. He further says, that the miraculous fact so attested, ought not only to be receiv’d, but to be receiv’d *for certain*. Is it not enough, Sir, that you have shown that your most full, most direct, most perfect argument may be overcome; will nothing satisfy you now but its destruction? One would imagine, that you had con-  
jur’d

jur'd up this demon, by whose irresistible arm you propos'd to give a mortal blow to religion, and render scepticism triumphant, (that you had conjur'd him up, I say) for no other purpose, but to show with what facility you could lay him. To be serious, does not this author remember, that he had oftener than once laid it down as a maxim, That when there is proof against proof, we must incline to the superior, still with a diminution of assurance, in proportion to the force of its antagonist \*! But when a fact is received for *certain*, there can be no sensible diminution of assurance, such diminution always implying some doubt and *uncertainty*. Consequently the general proof from experience, tho' as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagin'd, is not only surmounted, but is really in comparison as nothing, or, in Mr Hume's

\* p. 178. 180.

phrase,



phrase, undergoes annihilation, when balanced with the particular proof from testimony. Great indeed, it must be acknowledged, is the force of truth. This conclusion, on the principles I have been endeavouring to establish, has nothing in it, but what is conceivable and just; but on the principles of the essay, which derive all the force of testimony from experience, serves only to confound the understanding, and to involve the subject in midnight darkness.

'Tis therefore manifest, that either this author's principles condemn his own method of judging, with regard to miraculous facts; or that his method of judging subverts his principles, and is a tacit desertion of them. Thus that impregnable fortress, the asylum of infidelity, which he so lately gloried in having erected, is in a moment abandon'd by him, as a place untenable.

S E C-

## SECTION IV.

*There is no peculiar presumption against such miracles as are said to have been wrought in support of religion.*

**I**S it then so, that the decisive argument, the essayist flatter'd himself he had discovered, which with the wise and learned, was to prove an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and wou'd consequently be useful, as long as the world endures; is it so, that this boasted argument hath in fact little or no influence on the discoverer himself! But this author may well be excus'd. He cannot be always the metaphysician. He cannot soar incessantly in the clouds. Such constant elevation suits not the lot of humanity. He must sometimes, whether he will or not, descend to a level with other

people, and fall into the humble track of common sense. One thing however he is resolv'd on: If he cannot by metaphysic spells silence the most arrogant bigotry and superstition; he will at any rate, though for this purpose he shou'd borrow aid from what he hath no liking to, trite and popular topics; he will at any rate free himself from their impertinent solicitations.

There are accordingly two principles in human nature, by which he accounts for all the relations, that have ever been in the world, concerning miracles. These principles are, the *passion for the marvellous*, and the *religious affection* \*; against either of which singly, the philosopher, he says, ought ever to be on his guard; but incomparably more so, when both happen to be in strict confederacy together. "For if  
" the spirit of religion join itself to the

\* p. 184. 185.

" love



“love of wonder, there is an end of com-  
 “mon sense, and human testimony in  
 “these circumstances loses all pretensions  
 “to authority \*.” Notwithstanding this  
 strong affirmation, there is reason to su-  
 spect that the author is not in his heart, so  
 great an enemy to the love of wonder, as  
 he affects to appear. No man can make  
 a greater concession in favour of the won-  
 derful, than he hath done in the passage  
 quoted in the preceding section. No man  
 was ever fonder of paradox, and, in theo-  
 retical subjects, of every notion that is  
 remote from sentiments universally re-  
 ceiv’d. This love of paradoxes, he owns  
 himself, that both his enemies and his  
 friends reprove him with †. There must  
 surely be some foundation for so universal  
 a censure. If therefore, in respect of the  
 passion for the marvellous, he differ from  
 other people, the difference ariseth from a

\* p. 185.

† Dedication to the four dissertations.

particular delicacy in this gentleman, which makes him manifest even to wonder with the crowd. He is of that singular turn that where every body is struck with consternation, he can see nothing wondrous in the least; at the same time he discovers prodigies, where no soul but himself ever dreamt that there were any.

We may therefore rest assured of it, that the author might be conciliated to the *love of wonder*, provided the *spirit of religion* be kept at a distance, against which he hath unluckily contracted a mortal antipathy, against which he is resolv'd to wage eternal war. When he but touches this subject, he loseth at once his philosophic composure, and speaks with an acrimony unusual to him on other occasions. Something of this kind appears from the citations already made. But if these shou'd not satisfy, I shall produce one or two more, which cannot fail. There is a second

cond supposition the author makes, of a miraculous event, in a certain manner circumstanced and attested, which he declares, and I think with particular propriety, that he would "not have the least inclination to believe \*!" At his want of inclination the reader will not be surpris'd, when he learns, that this supposed miracle is concerning a *resurrection*, an event which bears too strong a resemblance both to the doctrine and miracles of holy writ, not to alarm a modern Pyrrhonist. To the above declaration he subjoins, "But shou'd this miracle be ascrib'd to any new system of religion, men in all ages have been so much impos'd on by ridiculous stories of that kind, that this very circumstance would be a full proof of a cheat, and sufficient with all men of sense, not only to make them reject the fact, but even reject it without further examina-

p. 204. in the note.



“*tion.*” Again, a little after, “As the vio-  
 “lations of truth are more common in  
 “the testimony concerning religious mi-  
 “racles, than in that concerning any  
 “other matter of fact,” (a point in which  
 the author is positive, tho’ he neither pro-  
 duceth facts nor arguments to support it)  
 “this must diminish very much the au-  
 “thority of the former testimony, and”  
 (pray observe his words) “*make us form a*  
 “GENERAL RESOLUTION, *never to lend*  
 “*any attention to it, with whatever specious*  
 “*pretext it may be cover’d.*”

Never did the passion of an inflamed o-  
 rator, or the intemperate zeal of a religio-  
 nist, carry him further against his adver-  
 sary, than this man of speculation is car-  
 ried by his prejudice against religion.  
 Demagogues and bigots have often warn’d  
 the people against listening to the argu-  
 ments of an envied and therefore detested  
 rival, lest by his sophistry they should be  
 seduced

seduced into the most fatal errors. The same part this author, a philosopher, a sceptic, a dispassionate inquirer after truth, as surely he chuseth to be accounted, now acts in favour of infidelity. He thinks it not safe to give religion even a hearing. Nay so strange a turn have matters taken of late with the managers of this controversy, that it is now the FREETHINKER who preaches *implicit faith*; 'tis the INFIDEL who warns us of the danger of consulting *reason*. Beware, says he, I admonish you, of inquiring into the strength of the plea, or of bringing it to the deceitful test of reason; for "those who will be  
 " so SILLY as to examine the affair by  
 " that medium, and seek particular flaws  
 " in the *testimony*, are almost sure to be  
 " confounded \*." That religion is concern'd in the matter, is reckon'd by these sagacious sufficient evidence of imposture. The

\* p. 197. in the note.

proofs she offers in her own defence, we are told by this candid judge, ought to be rejected, and *rejected without examination.*

The old way of scrutiny and argument must now be set aside, having been at length discover'd to be but a bungling, a tedious, and a dangerous way at best.

What then shall we substitute in its place?

The essayist hath a most admirable expedient. A shorter and surer method he recommends to us, the expeditious way of

*resolution.* 'Form,' says he, 'a GENERAL RESOLUTION, never to lend any attention to testimonies or facts urged by religion, with whatever specious pretext they may be cover'd.'

I had almost congratulated Mr Hume, and our enlighten'd age, on this happy invention, before I reflected, that tho' the application might be new, the expedient itself, of resolving to be deaf to argument, was very ancient, having been often with

great



great success employ'd against atheists and heretics, and warmly recommended by Bellarmine and Scotus, and most others of that bright fraternity the schoolmen: Persons, I acknowledge, to whom it would be difficult, perhaps in any other instance, to find a resemblance in my ingenious opponent.

I'm afraid that after such a declaration, I must not presume to consider myself as arguing with the author, who hath, in so peremptory a manner, resolv'd to attend to nothing that can be said on this subject, in opposition to his theory. 'What judgment he has,' to use his own expression, 'he has renounced by principle; in these sublime and mysterious subjects \*.' If however it should prove the fate of these papers, the forbidding title of them notwithstanding; to be at any time honour'd with the perusal of some infidel,

not indeed so rivetted in unbelief as the essayist, I would earnestly intreat such reader, in the solemn style of Mr Hume, "To lay his hand upon his heart, and "after serious consideration declare \*," If any of the patrons of religion had acted this part, and warn'd people not to try by *argument* the metaphysical subtleties of the adversaries, affirming, that "if they were 'MAD enough to examine the affair by that 'medium, and seek particular flaws in the 'reasoning, they were almost sure to be confounded; that the only prudent method 'was, to form a GENERAL RESOLUTION, 'never to lend any attention to what was 'advanced on the opposite side, *however* 'specious; would not these gentlemen have raised great subject of triumph from this conduct? would it not have been construed into a tacit conviction of the weakness of our cause, which we were afraid

\* p. 206.

Sect. 4. PROOF FROM TESTIMONY. 81

of exposing in the light, and bringing to a fair trial? But we scorn to take shelter in obscurity, and meanly to decline the combat; confident as we are, that REASON is our ally and our friend, and glad to find that the enemy at length so violently suspects her.

As to the first method, by which the author accounts for the fabulous relations of monsters and prodigies, 'tis freely acknowledged, that the creator hath implanted in human nature, as a spur to the pursuit of knowledge, a principle of *curiosity*, which makes the mind feel a particular pleasure in every new acquisition. 'Tis acknowledged also, that as every principle in our nature is liable to abuse, so this principle will often give the mind a bias to the marvellous, for the more marvellous any thing is, that is, the more unlike to all that hath formerly been known, the

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more



more new it is; and this bias, in many instances, may induce belief on insufficient evidence.

But the presumption that hence ariseth against the marvellous is not stronger in the case of miracles (as will appear from an attentive perusal of the second section) than in the case of every fact that is perfectly extraordinary. Yet how easily this obstacle may be overcome by testimony, might be illustrated, if necessary, in almost every branch of science, in physiology, in geography, in history. On the contrary, what an immense impediment would this presumption prove to the progress of philosophy and letters, had it in reality one fiftieth part of the strength, which the author seems to impute to it. I shall not tire my reader or myself by recurring to the philosophic wonders in electricity, chymistry, magnetism, which, all the world sees, may be fully prov'd to us

by

by testimony, before we make the experiments ourselves.

BUT there is, it seems, additional to this, a peculiar presumption against religious miracles. "The wife," as the author hath observ'd with reason, "lend a very academic faith to every report, which favours the passion of the reporter, whether it magnifies his country, his family, or himself, or in any other way strikes in with his natural inclinations and propensities \*." Now, as no object whatever operates more powerfully on the fancy than *religion* does, or works up the passions to a higher fervour; so, in matters relating to this subject, if in any subject, we have reason to suspect that the understanding will prove a dupe to the passions. On this point therefore we ought to be peculiarly cautious, that we

\* p. 200.

be not hasty of belief. In this sentiment we all agree.

But there is one circumstance, which he hath overlook'd, and which is nevertheless of the greatest consequence in the debate. It is this, that the prejudice resulting from the religious affection, may just as readily *obstruct*, as *promote* our faith in a religious miracle. What things in nature are more contrary, than one religion is to another religion? They are just as contrary as light and darkness, truth and error. The affections, with which they are contemplated by the same person, are just as opposite, as desire and aversion, love and hatred. The same religious zeal which gives the mind of a Christian, a *propensity* to the belief of a miracle in support of Christianity, will inspire him with an *aversion* from the belief of a miracle in support of Mahometism. The same



same principle, which will make him acquiesce in evidence *less* than sufficient in the one case, will make him require evidence *more* than sufficient in the other.

Before then the remark of the author can be of any use in directing our judgment, as to the evidence of miracles attested, we must consider whether the original tenets of the witnesses ought to have biased their minds in *favour* of the miracles, or in *opposition* to them. If the former was the case, the testimony is so much the *less* to be regarded; if the latter, so much the *more*. Will it satisfy on this head to acquaint us, that the prejudices of the witnesses must have favour'd the miracles, since they were zealous promoters of the doctrine, in support of which those miracles are said to have been perform'd? To answer thus wou'd be to misunderstand the point. The question is, Was this doctrine the faith of  
the

the witnesses, before they saw, or fancied they saw the miracles? If it was, I agree with him. Great, very great allowance must be made for the prejudices of education, for principles, early perhaps, carefully, and deeply rooted in their minds, and for the religious affection founded in these principles; which allowance must always derogate from the weight of their testimony. But if the faith of the witnesses stood originally in opposition to the doctrine attested by the miracles; if the only account that can be given of their conversion, is the conviction which the miracles produced in them; it must be a preposterous way of arguing, to derive their conviction from a religious zeal, which would at first obstinately withstand, and for some time hinder such conviction. On the contrary, that the evidence arising from miracles perform'd in proof of a doctrine disbeliev'd, and consequently hated before, did  
in

in fact surmount that obstacle, and conquer all the opposition arising thence, is a very strong presumption in favour of that evidence: just as strong a presumption in its favour, as it would have been against it, had all their former zeal, and principles, and prejudices, co-operated with the evidence, whatever it was, in gaining an entire assent.

Hence there is the greatest disparity in this respect, a disparity which deserves to be particularly attended to, betwixt the evidence of miracles perform'd in proof of a religion *to be* establish'd, perform'd in *contradiction* to opinions generally receiv'd; and the evidence of miracles perform'd in support of a religion *already* establish'd, and in *confirmation* of opinions generally receiv'd. Hence also the greatest disparity betwixt the miracles recorded by the evangelists, and those related by Mariana, Bede, or any monkish historian.

THERE



THERE is then no peculiar presumption against religious miracles merely as such; if in certain circumstances there is a presumption against them, the presumption ariseth solely from the circumstances, in so much that, in the opposite circumstances, it is as strongly in their favour.

## SECTION V.

*There is a peculiar presumption in favour of such miracles as are said to have been wrought in support of religion.*

**I**N this section I propose to consider the reverse of the question treated in the former. In the former I prov'd that there is no peculiar presumption against religious miracles; I now inquire whether there be any in their favour. The question is important, and intimately connected with the subject.

THE

THE boldest infidel will not deny, that the immortality of the soul, a future and eternal state, and the connection of our happiness or misery in that state, with our present good or bad conduct, not to mention the doctrines concerning the divinity and perfections, are tenets which carry no absurdity in them. They may be true for aught he knows. He doth not believe them, not because they are incredible in themselves, but because he hath not evidence of their truth. He pretends not to disprove them, nor does he think the task incumbent on him. He only pleads, that before he can yield them his assent, they must be prov'd.

Now, as whatever is possible, may be suppos'd, let us suppose that the dogmas above mentioned are all infallible truths; and let the unbeliever say, whether he can conceive an object worthier of the divine interposal, than to reveal these truths to

M                      mankind;

mankind; and to enforce them in such a manner, as may give them a suitable influence on the heart and life. Of all the inhabitants of the earth, man is incomparably the noblest. Whatever therefore regards the interest of the human species, is a grander concern, than what regards either the inanimate or the brute creation. If man was made, as is doubtless not impossible, for an after state of immortality; whatever relates to that immortal state, or may conduce to prepare him for the fruition of it, must be immensely superior to that which merely concerns the transient enjoyments of the present life. How sublime then is the object which religion, and religion only, exhibits as the ground of supernatural interpositions! It is the interest of man, a reasonable and moral agent, the only being in this lower world which bears in his soul the image of his maker; not the interest of an individual,

but



but of the kind; not for a limited duration, but for eternity: an object at least in one respect adequate to the majesty of God.

Does this appear to the essayist too much like arguing *a priori*, of which I know he hath a detestation? It is just such an argument, as, presupposing the most rational principles of Deism, results from those maxims concerning intelligent causes, and their operations, which are founded in general experience, and which uniformly lead us to expect, that the end will be proportionate to the means. The *Pagans* of Rome had notions of their divinities infinitely inferior to the opinions concerning God, which in Christian countries are maintain'd even by those, who, for distinction's sake, are called *DEISTS*. Yet such of the former as had any justness of taste, were offended with those poets, who exhibited the celestials on slight occasions, and for trivial purposes, interfering

in the affairs of men. Why? Because such an exhibition shock'd all the principles of probability. It had not that verisimilitude which is absolutely necessary to render fiction agreeable. Accordingly it is a precept, with relation to the machinery of the drama, given by one who was both a critic and a poet, That a god must never be introduced, unless to accomplish some important design, which could not be otherwise effectuated \*. The foundation of this rule, which is that of my argument, is therefore one of those indisputable principles, which are found every where, among the earliest results of experience.

Thus it appears, that from the dignity of the end, there ariseth a peculiar presumption in favour of such miracles, as

\* Nec deus interfit, nisi dignus vindice nodus

Inciderit.

HORAT.

are

are said to have been wrought in support of religion.

# SECTION VI.

*Inquiry into the meaning and propriety of one of Mr Hume's favourite maxims.*

**T**HERE is a method truly curious, suggested by the author, for extricating the mind, should the evidence from testimony be so great, that its falsehood might, as he terms it, be accounted miraculous. In this puzzling case, when a man is beset with miracles, that he is under a necessity of admitting one, he must always take care it be the smallest; for it is an axiom in this writer's DIALECTIC, That the probability of the fact is in the inverse ratio of the quantity of miracle there is in it. "I weigh," says he, "the  
" one miracle against the other, and ac-  
" cording



“ according to the superiority which I disco-  
 “ ver, I pronounce my decision, and al-  
 “ ways reject the greater miracle \*.”

Now, of this method, which will no doubt be thought by many to be very ingenious, and which appears to the essayist both very momentous and very perspicuous, I own, I am not able to discover either the reasonableness or the use.

First, I cannot see the reasonableness. ‘A miracle,’ to adopt his own definition, ‘implies the transgression,’ or rather the suspension, ‘of some law of nature; and that either by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposals of some invisible agent †.’ Now, as I should think, from the principles laid down in the preceding section, that it would be for no trifling purpose, that the laws of nature would be suspended, and

\* p. 182. † Ib. in the note.

either

either the Deity or an invifible agent would interpoſe; 'tis on the ſame principles, natural to imagine, that the means, or miracle perform'd, ſhould bear a proportion, in reſpect of dignity and greatneſs, to the end propos'd. Were I therefore under ſuch a neceſſity as is ſuppos'd by Mr Hume, of admitting the truth of a miracle, I acknowledge, that of two contradictory miracles, where all other circumſtances are equal, I ſhould think it reaſonable to believe the greater. I ſhall borrow an illuſtration from the author himſelf. "A miracle," he ſays, "may either be "*discoverable* by men or not. This alters "not its nature and eſſence. The raiſing "of a houſe or ſhip into the air is a viſible "miracle; the raiſing of a feather, when "the wind wants *ever ſo little* of a force "requiſite for that purpoſe, is as real a "miracle, tho' not ſo *ſenſible* with regard

which he ſays, "to

"to us \*." Surely if any miracle may be called *little*, the last above mentioned is intitled to that denomination, not only because it is an *undiscoverable* and *insensible* miracle, but because the quantum of miraculous force requisite, is, by the hypothesis, *ever so little*, or the least conceivable. Yet if it were certain, that God, angel, or spirit, were, for one of those purposes, to interpose in suspending the laws of nature; I believe most men would join with me in thinking, that it wou'd be rather for the raising of a *house* or *ship*, than for the raising of a *feather*.

But though the maxim laid down by the author were perfectly just, I cannot discover in what instance, or by what application, it can be render'd of any utility. Why? Because we have no rule, whereby we can judge of the greatness of miracles. I allow, that in such a singular instance,

\* p. 182. in the note.



as that above quoted from the essay, we may judge safely enough. But that can be of no practical use. In almost every case that will occur, I may warrantably aver, that it will be impossible for the acutest intellect to decide, which of two is the greater miracle. As to the author, I cannot find that he has favour'd us with any light, in so important and so critical a question. Have we not then some reason to dread, that the task will not be less difficult, to furnish us with a *measure*, by which we can determine the magnitude of miracles; than to provide us with a *balance*, by which we can ascertain the weight of testimonies and experiences?

If leaving the speculations of the essayist, we shall, in order to be assisted on this subject, recur to his example, and manner of judging; let us consider the miracle which was recited in the third section, and which he declares, would, on the evi-

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dence

dence of such testimony as he supposes, not only be probable, but certain. For my part, 'tis not in my power to conceive a greater miracle than that is. The whole universe is affected by it; the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars. The most invariable laws of nature with which we are acquainted, even those which regulate the motions of the heavenly bodies, and dispense darkness and light to worlds, are violated. I appeal to the author himself, whether it could be called a greater, or even so great a miracle, that all the writers at that time, or even all mankind, had been seiz'd with a new species of epidemical delirium, which had given rise to this strange illusion. But in this the author is remarkably unfortunate, that the principles by which he in fact regulates his judgment and belief, are often the reverse of those which he endeavours to establish in his theory.

SHALL

SHALL I hazard a conjecture? It is, that the word *miracle*, as thus us'd by the author, is us'd in a vague and improper sense, as a synonymous term for *improbable*; and that believing the *less*, and rejecting the *greater miracle*, denote simply believing what is *least*, and rejecting what is *most improbable*; or still more explicitly, believing what we think *most worthy of belief*, and rejecting what we think *least worthy*.

I am aware, on a second perusal of the author's words, that my talent in guessing may be justly question'd. He hath in effect told us himself what he means.

"When any one," says he, "tells me, that he saw a dead man restor'd to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more *probable*, that this person should either deceive or be deceiv'd, or that the fact he relates, should really have happen'd. I weigh the one *miracle* against the other; and according



"to the superiority which I discover, I  
 "pronounce my decision, and always re-  
 "ject the greater miracle. If the false-  
 "hood of his testimony would be more  
 "miraculous than the event which he re-  
 "lates; then, and not till then, can he  
 "pretend to command my belief or opi-  
 "nion \*." At first indeed one is ready to  
 exclaim, What a strange *revolution* is  
 here! The belief of miracles then, even  
 by Mr Hume's account, is absolutely in-  
 evitable. Miracles themselves too, so far  
 from being impossible, or even extraordi-  
 nary, are the commonest things in nature,  
 so common, that when any miraculous  
 fact is attested to us, we are equally under  
 a necessity of believing a miracle, whether  
 we believe the fact, or deny it. The  
 whole difference between the essayist and  
 us, is at length reduced to this single  
 point, Whether greater or smaller miracles

\* p. 187.

Sect. 6. PROOF FROM TESTIMONY. 101

are intitled to the preference. This mystery however vanishes on a nearer inspection. The style, we find, is figurative, and the author is all the while amusing both his readers and himself with an unusual application of a familiar term. What is call'd weighing of *probabilities* in one sentence, is weighing of *miracles* in the next. If it were ask'd, For what reason did not Mr Hume express his sentiment in ordinary and proper words? I could only answer, I know no reason but one, and that is, To give the appearance of novelty and grandeur to one of those very harmless propositions, which by philosophers are called *identical*, and which, to say the truth, need some disguise, to make them pass upon the world with tolerable decency.

What then shall be said of the conclusion which he gives as the sum and quintessence of the first part of the essay? \* The  
best

best thing, for aught I know, that can be said, is, that it contains a most certain truth, tho' at the same time the least significant, that ever perhaps was usher'd into the world with so much solemnity. In order therefore to make *plainer English* of his *plain consequence*, let us only change the word *miraculous*, as apply'd to the falsehood of human testimony, into *improbable*, which in this passage is entirely equivalent, and observe the effect produced by this elucidation. - "The plain consequence is, and 'tis a GENERAL MAXIM, *worthy of our attention*, That NO TESTIMONY IS SUFFICIENT TO ESTABLISH A MIRACLE; UNLESS THE TESTIMONY BE OF SUCH A KIND, THAT ITS FALSEHOOD WOULD BE MORE IMPROBABLE, THAN THE FACT WHICH IT ENDEAVOURS TO ESTABLISH\*." If the reader thinks

\* p. 182.

himself



himself instructed by this discovery, I  
 should be loath to envy him the pleasure  
 he may derive from it.

PART

263. 6. PROOF FROM TESTIMONY. 103  
I myself instructed by this discovery,  
DISSENTATION

ON

M I R A C L E S.

P A R T II.

The miracles on which the belief  
of Christianity is founded, are  
sufficiently attested.

S E C T I O N I.

*There is no presumption, arising from human  
nature, against the miracles said to have  
been wrought in proof of Christianity.*

**F**ROM what hath been evinced in the  
fourth and fifth sections of the  
former part, with regard to reli-  
gion in general, *two corollaries* are clearly  
deducible

deducible in favour of Christianity. *One* is, That the presumption arising from the dignity of the end, to say the least of it, can in no religion be pleaded with greater advantage, than in the Christian. *The other* is, That the presumption arising from the religious affection, instead of weakening, corroborates the evidence of the gospel. The faith of Jesus was promulgated, and gained ground, not with the assistance, but in defiance, of all the religious zeal and prejudices of the times.

IN order to invalidate the *second* corollary, it will possibly be urged, that proselytes to a religious system, different from that wherein they were educated, may be gain'd at first; either by address and eloquence, or by the appearances of uncommon sanctity, and rapturous fervours of devotion; that if once people have commenced proselytes, the transition to enthusiasm



fiafm is almost unavoidable ; and that enthufiafm will fully account for the utmoft pitch both of credulity and falfehood.

Admitting that a few converts might be made by the aforefaid arts, it is fubverfive of all the laws of probability, to imagine, that the ftrongeft prepoileffions, fortified with that vehement abhorrence which contradiction in religious principles rarely fails to excite, fhould be fo eafily vanquifh'd in multitudes. Befides, the very pretext of fupporting the doctrine by miracles, if a falfe pretext, would of neceffity do unfpeakable hurt to the caufe. The pretence of miracles will quickly attract the attention of all to whom the new doctrine is published. The influence which addrefs and eloquence, appearances of fanctity and fervours of devotion, would otherwife have had, however great, will be fuperfeded by the confideration of what is infinitely more ftriking and decifive. The  
miracles

miracles will therefore first be canvassed, and canvassed with a temper of mind the most unfavourable to conviction. 'Tis not solely on the testimony of the evangelists that Christians believe the gospel, tho' that testimony appears in all respects such as merits the highest regard; but it is on the success of the gospel; it is on the testimony, as we may justly call it, of the numberless proselytes that were daily made to a religion, opposing all the religious professions then in the world, and appealing, for the satisfaction of every body, to the visible and miraculous interposition of Heaven in its favour. The witnesses consider'd in this light, and in this light they ought to be consider'd, will be found more than 'a sufficient number:' and tho' perhaps there were few of them, what the author would denominate 'men of education and learning;' yet, which is more essential, they were generally men of good sense,

sense, and knowledge enough to secure them against all delusion, as to those plain facts for which they gave their testimony; men who (in the common acceptance of the words) neither did, nor could derive to themselves either interest or honour by their attestations, but did evidently endanger both.

It deserves also to be remember'd, that there is here no contradictory testimony, notwithstanding that both the founder of our religion and his adherents were from the first surrounded by inveterate enemies, who never 'esteem'd the matter too incon- siderable to deserve their attention or regard;' and who, as they could not want the means, gave evident proofs that they wanted not the inclination to detect the fraud, if there had been any fraud to be detected. They were jealous of their own reputation and authority, and foresaw but too clearly, that the success of Jesus would  
give



give a fatal blow to both. As to the testimonies themselves, we may permit the author to try them by his own rules \*. There is here no opposition of testimony; there is no apparent ground of suspicion from the character of the witnesses; there is no interest which they could have in imposing on the world; there is not a small number of witnesses, they are innumerable. Do the historians of our Lord deliver their testimony with doubt and hesitation? Do they fall into the opposite extreme of using too violent asseverations? So far from both, that the most amazing instances of divine power, and the most interesting events, are related without any censure or reflection of the writers on persons, parties, actions, or opinions; with such an unparallel'd and unaffected simplicity, as demonstrates, that they were neither themselves animated by passion

\* p. 178.

like

like enthusiasts, nor had any design of working on the passions of their readers. The greatest miracles are recorded, with as little appearance either of doubt or wonder in the writer, and with as little suspicion of the reader's incredulity, as the most ordinary incidents: A manner as unlike that of impostors as of enthusiasts; a manner in which those writers are altogether singular; and I will add, a manner which can on no supposition be tolerably accounted for, but that of the truth, and not of the truth only, but of the notoriety, of the events which they related. They spoke like people, who had themselves been long familiariz'd to such acts of omnipotence and grace. They spoke like people, who knew, that many of the most marvellous actions they related, had been so publicly perform'd, and in the presence of multitudes alive at the time of their writing, as to be uncontrovertible, and as  
in

in fact not to have been controverted, even by their bitterest foes. They could boldly appeal on this head to their enemies. *A man, say they, speaking of their master \*, approved of God among you, by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as YE YOURSELVES ALSO KNOW.* The objections of Christ's persecutors against his doctrine, those objections also which regard the nature of his miracles, are, together with his answers, faithfully recorded by the sacred historians; 'tis strange, if the occasion had been given, that we have not the remotest hint of any objections against the reality of his miracles, and a confutation of those objections.

BUT passing the manner in which the first profelytes may be gain'd to a new religion, and supposing some actually gain'd,

\* Acts ii. 22.



no matter how, to the faith of Jesus; can it be easily accounted for, that even with the help of those early converts, this religion should have been propagated in the world, on the *false* pretence of miracles? Nothing more easily, says the author. Those original propagators of the gospel have been deceiv'd themselves; for "a religionist may be an *enthusiast*, and imagine he sees what has no reality \*."

Were this admitted, it would not, in the present case, remove the difficulty. He must not only himself imagine he sees what has no reality, he must make every body present, those who are no enthusiasts, nor even friends, nay he must make enemies also, imagine they see the same thing which he imagines he sees; for the miracles of Jesus were acknowledged by those who persecuted him.

That an *enthusiast* is very liable to be

\* p. 185,

impos'd

impos'd on, in whatever favours the particular species of enthusiasm, with which he is affected, none, who knows any thing of the human heart, will deny. But still this frailty hath its limits. For my own part, I cannot find examples of any, even among enthusiasts, (unless to the conviction of every body they were distracted) who did not see and hear in the same manner as other people. Many of this tribe have mistaken the reveries of a heated imagination, for the communications of the Divine Spirit, who never, in one single instance, mistook the operations of their external senses. Without marking this difference, we should make no distinction between the *enthusiastic* character and the *frantic*, which are in themselves evidently distinct. How shall we then account from *enthusiasm*, for the testimony given by the apostles, concerning the resurrection of their master, and his ascension into heaven,

P
ven,

ven, not to mention innumerable other facts? In these it was impossible that any, who in the use of their reason were but one remove from *Bedlamites*, should have been deceiv'd. Yet, in the present case, the unbeliever must even say more than this, and, accumulating absurdity upon absurdity, must affirm, that the apostles were deceiv'd as to the resurrection and ascension of their master, notwithstanding that they themselves had concerted the plan of stealing his body, and concealing it.

BUT this is not the only resource of the infidel. If he is driven from this strong hold, he can take refuge in another. Admit the apostles were not deceiv'd themselves, they may nevertheless have been, thro' mere devotion and benevolence, incited to deceive the rest of mankind. The religionist, rejoins the author, " may know  
" his



“ his narration to be false, and yet perfe-  
 “ vere in it, with the best intentions in  
 “ the world, for the sake of promoting so  
 “ holy a cause \*.”

That little pious frauds, as they are absurdly, not to say impiously, called, have been often practis'd by ignorant zealots, in support of a cause, which they firmly believ'd to be both true and holy, is not indeed to be question'd. But in all such cases the truth and holiness of the cause are wholly independent of those artifices. A person may be persuaded of the former, who is too clear-sighted to be deceiv'd by the latter. In the Romish church, for example, there are many zealous and orthodox believers, who are nevertheless incapable of being impos'd on by the lying wonders, which some of their clergy have practis'd. The circumstances of the apo-

\* p. 185.

fies were widely different. Some of those  
 miraculous events which they attested,  
 were not only the *evidences*, but the distin-  
 guishing *doctrines* of the religion which  
 they taught. What were the tenets, by  
 which they were distinguish'd, in their re-  
 ligious system, particularly from the Pha-  
 risees, who own'd not only the unity and  
 perfections of the Godhead, the existence  
 of angels and demons, but the general  
 resurrection, and a future state of rewards  
 and punishments? Were not these their pe-  
 culiar tenets, That ' Jesus, whom the Jews  
 ' and Romans join'd in crucifying with-  
 ' out the gates of Jerusalem, had suffer'd  
 ' that ignominious death, to make atone-  
 ' ment for the sins of men \*? that, in  
 ' testimony of this, and of the divine ac-  
 ' ceptance, God had rais'd him from the  
 ' dead? that he had exalted him to his  
 ' own right hand, to be a prince and a

\* Rom. v. 6. &c.

' favour,

‘ favour, to give repentance to the people,  
 ‘ and the remission of their sins \*? that  
 ‘ he is now our advocate with the Fa-  
 ‘ ther †? that he will descend from hea-  
 ‘ ven at the last day, to judge the world  
 ‘ in righteousness ‡. and to receive his  
 ‘ faithful disciples into heaven, to be for-  
 ‘ ever with himself ||?’ These fundamen-  
 tal articles of their system, they must  
 have known, deserv’d no better appella-  
 tion than a string of lies, if we suppose  
 them liars in the testimony they gave of  
 the resurrection and ascension of their ma-  
 ster. If, agreeably to the Jewish hypothe-  
 sis, they had, in a most wonderful and da-  
 ring manner, stole by night the corpse  
 from the sepulchre, that on the report of  
 his resurrection, they might found the stu-  
 pendous fabric they had projected among  
 themselves, how was it possible they should  
 conceive the cause to be either true or ho-

\* Acts ii. 32. &c. v. 30. &c. x. 40. &c. † I Jo. ii. 1.  
 ‡ Acts x. 42. xvii. 31. || Jo. xiv. 3.



ly? They must have known, that in those cardinal points, on which all depends, they were false witnesses concerning God, wilful corrupters of the religion of their country, and public, though indeed disinterested incendiaries, wheresoever they went. They could not therefore enjoy even that poor solace, 'that the end will sanctify the means;' a solace with which the monk or anchoret silences the remonstrances of his conscience, when, in defence of a religion which he regards as certain, he, by some pitiful juggler-trick, imposeth on the credulity of the rabble. On the contrary, the whole scheme of the apostles must have been, and not only must have been, but must have appear'd to themselves, a most audacious freedom with their maker, a villanous imposition on the world, and I will add, a most foolish and ridiculous project of heaping ruin and disgrace upon themselves, without the prospect of any compen-

compensation in the present life, or reversion in the future.

ONCE more, can we account for so extraordinary a phenomenon, by attributing it to that greatest of all motives, as the author thinks it\*, “an ambition to attain so sublime a character, as that of a missionary, a prophet, an ambassador from heaven?”

Not to mention, that such a towering ambition was but ill adapted to the mean rank, poor education, and habitual circumstances, of such men as the apostles mostly had been; a desire of that kind, whatever wonders it may effectuate, when supported by enthusiasm, and faith, and zeal, must have soon been crush'd by the outward, and to human appearance insurmountable difficulties and distresses they had to encounter; when quite unsupport-

\* P. 200.

ed from within by either faith, or hope, or the testimony of a good conscience; rather I should have said, when they themselves were haunted from within by a consciousness of the blackest guilt, impiety, and baseness. Strange indeed it must be own'd without a parallel, that in such a cause, and in such circumstances, not only one, but all, should have the resolution to persevere to the last, in spite of infamy and torture; and that no one among so many confederates, should be induced to betray the dreadful secret.

THUS it appears, that no *address* in the FOUNDER of our religion, no *enthusiastic credulity*, no *pious frauds*, no *ambitious views*, in the FIRST CONVERTS, will account for its propagation on the plea of miracles, if false; and that consequently there is no presumption arising from *human nature* against the miracles said to have



have been wrought in proof of Christianity.

## SECTION II.

*There is no presumption arising from the history of mankind, against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of Christianity.*

**I**N the foregoing section I reason'd only from the knowledge we acquire by experience, concerning *human nature*, and the motives by which we see that men are influenced in their conduct. I come now to the examination of facts, that I may know whether the *history of mankind* will invalidate or corroborate my reasonings.

THE essayist is confident, that all the evidence resulting hence is on his side.

Q

Nay

Nay so unquestionable a truth does this appear to him, that he never attempts to prove it: he always presupposeth it, as a point universally acknowledged. Men in 'all ages,' we learn from a passage already quoted, 'have been much impos'd on, by 'ridiculous stories of miracles ascrib'd to 'new systems of religion\*.' Again he asserts, that "the violations of truth are "more common in the testimony concern- "ing religious miracles, than in that con- "cerning any other matter of fact †." These assertions however, tho' us'd for the same purpose, the attentive reader will observe, are far from conveying the same sense, or being of equal weight in the argument. The difference hath been marked in the fourth section of the first part of this tract. The oracular predictions among the ancient Pagans, and the pretended wonders perform'd by capuchins and

\* p. 204. in the note.

† p. 205. in the note.

friars,

friars, by itinerant or stationary teachers among the Roman Catholics, the author will doubtless reckon among religious miracles; but he can with no propriety denominate them, miracles ascrib'd to a new system of religion\*. Now 'tis with those

of  
nd \* Should the author insist, that such miracles are nevertheless meant to establish, if not a new system, at least some *new point* of religion; that those which are wrought in Spain, for example, are not intended as proofs of the gospel, but as proofs of the efficacy of a particular *crucifix*, or *relic*; which is always a *new point*, or at least not universally receiv'd: I must beg the reader will consider, what is the meaning of this expression, *a new point of religion*. It is not *a new system*, 'tis not even *a new doctrine*. We know, that one article of faith in the church of Rome is, that the images and relics of saints ought to be worshipped. We know also, that in proof of this article, 'tis one of their principal arguments, that miracles are wrought by means of such relics and images. We know further, that that church never attempted to enumerate her relics and other trumpery, and thus to ascertain the individual objects of the adoration of her votaries. The producing therefore a *new relic*, *image*, or *crucifix*, as an object of worship, implies not the smallest *deviation* from the *faith establish'd*; at the same time the opinion, that *miracles* are perform'd by means of such



of the class last mentioned, and with those only, that I am concerned; for 'tis only to them that the miracles wrought in proof of Christianity bear any analogy.

I shall then examine impartially this bold assertion, That 'men in all ages have been much impos'd on, by ridiculous stories of miracles ascrib'd to new systems of religion.' For my part, it appears to me clear as day, that there is not the shadow of truth in it. What could induce an author so well vers'd in the annals both of ancient and modern times as Mr Hume, in such a positive manner to advance it, I am at a loss to conceive. I believe it will require no elaborate disquisition to evince, th at these two, JUDAISM

relic, image, or crucifix, proves, in the minds of the people, for the reason assign'd, a very strong *confirmation* of the *faith establish'd*. All such miracles therefore must be consider'd, as wrought in support of the receiv'd superstition, and accordingly are always favour'd by the popular prejudices.

and

and CHRISTIANITY, are of all that have subsisted, or now subsist in the world, the only religions, which claim to have been founded on the evidence of *miracles*. It deserves also to be remarked, that it is more in conformity to common language, and incidental distinctions which have arisen, than to strict propriety, that I denominate Judaism and Christianity, two religions. 'Tis true, the Jewish creed, in the days of our Saviour, having been corrupted by rabbinical traditions, stood in many respects, and at this day stands, in direct opposition to the gospel. But when we consider the religion of the Jews, not as the system of faith and practice, which presently obtains, or heretofore hath obtain'd among that people; but solely as the religion that is revealed in *the law and the prophets*, we must acknowledge, that in this institution are contained the rudiments of the gospel. The same great  
plan

plan carried on by the divine providence, for the recovery and final happiness of mankind, is the subject of both dispensations. They are by consequence closely connected. In the former we are acquainted with the *occasion and rise*, in the latter more fully with the *progress and completion* of this benign contrivance. 'Tis for this reason that the scriptures of the *Old Testament*, which alone contain the authentic religion of the *SYNAGOGUE*, have ever been acknowledged in the *CHURCH*, an essential part of the *gospel-revelation*. The apostles and evangelists, in every part of their writings, presuppose the truth of the *Mosaic economy*, and often found both their doctrine and arguments upon it. 'Tis therefore, I affirm, only in proof of this one series of revelations, that the aid of miracles hath with success been pretended to.

GAN



CAN the Pagan religion, I should rather say, can any of the numberless religions (for they are totally distinct) known by the common name of *Pagan*, produce any claim of this kind that will merit our attention? If the author knows of any, I wish he had mention'd it; for in all antiquity, as far as my acquaintance with it reacheth, I can recollect no such claim. However, that I may not, on the one hand, appear to pass the matter too slightly; or, on the other, lose myself, as Mr Hume expresses it, in too wide a field; I shall briefly consider, whether the ancient religions of *Greece* or *Rome* (which of all the species of Heathenish superstition are on many accounts the most remarkable) can present a claim of this nature. Will it be said, that that monstrous heap of fables we find in ancient bards, relating to the genealogy, production, amours and achievements, of the gods, are the miracles on  
which

which Greek and Roman Paganism claims to be founded?

If one should talk in this manner, I must remind him, *first*, that these are by no means exhibited as EVIDENCES; but as the THEOLOGY itself; the poets always using the same affirmative style concerning what passed in heaven, in hell, and in the ocean, where men could not be spectators; as concerning what passed upon the earth; *secondly*, that all those mythological tales are confessedly recorded many centuries after they are supposed to have happened; no voucher, no testimony, nothing that can deserve the name of evidence having been produced, or even alledged, in proof of them; *thirdly*, that the intention of the writers seems to be solely the amusement, not the conviction of their readers; that accordingly no writer scruples to model the mythology to his particular taste, or rather caprice; but all agree in arrogating

on

on this, as being a province subject to the laws of Parnassus, the immemorial privilege of poets; to say and feign, unquestion'd, what they please; and *fourthly*, that at least several of their narrations are allegorical, and as plainly intended to convey some physical or moral instruction, as any of the apologues of Æsop. But to have said even thus much in refutation of so absurd a plea, will perhaps to many readers appear superfluous.

LEAVING therefore the endless absurdities and incoherent fictions of idolaters, I shall inquire, in the next place, whether the MAHOMETAN worship (which in its speculative principles appears more rational) pretends to have been built on the evidence of miracles.

Mahomet, the founder of this profession, openly and frequently, as all the world knows, disclaim'd such evidence. He

R

frankly



frankly own'd, that he had no commission nor power to work miracles, being sent of God to the people only as a preacher. Not indeed but that there are things mentioned in the revelation he pretended to give them, which, if true, would have been miraculous; such are the nocturnal visits of the angel Gabriel, (not unlike those secret interviews, which Numa, the institutor of the Roman rites, affirm'd that he had with the goddess Egeria) his getting from time to time parcels of the uncreated book transmitted to him from heaven, and his most amazing night-journey. But these miracles could be no evidences of his mission, because no person was witness to them. On the contrary, it was because his adherents had previously and implicitly believ'd his apostleship, that they admitted things so incredible, on his bare declaration. There is indeed one miracle, and but one, which  
he

he often urgeth against the infidels, as the main support of his cause; a miracle, for which even we in this distant region and period, have not only the evidence of testimony, but, if we please to use it, all the evidence which the contemporaries and countrymen of this military apostle ever enjoy'd. The miracle I mean is the manifest divinity, or supernatural excellence, of the scriptures which he gave them; a miracle, concerning which I shall only say, that as it falls not under the cognisance of the senses, but of a much more fallible tribunal, taste in composition, and critical discernment, so a principle of less efficacy than enthusiasm, even the slightest partiality, may make a man, in this particular, imagine he perceives what hath no reality. Certain it is, that notwithstanding the many defiances, which the prophet gave his enemies, sometimes to produce ten chapters, sometimes one, that

could bear to be compar'd with an equal portion of the perspicuous book\*, they seem not in the least to have been convinced, that there was any thing miraculous in the matter. Nay this sublime performance, so highly venerated by every Mussulman, they were not afraid to blaspheme as contemptible, calling it, "A confus'd heap of dreams," and "the silly fables of ancient times †."

Passing therefore this equivocal miracle, if I may call it so, which I imagine was of very little use in making proselytes, whatever use it might have had, in confirming and tutoring those already made, it may be worth while to inquire, what were the reasons, that an engine of such amazing influence was never employ'd by one who assumed a character so eminent, as the

\* Alcoran. The chapter — of the cow — of Jonas, — of Hud.

† — Of cattle, — of the spoils, — of the prophets.



chief of God's apostles, and the seal of the prophet. Was it the want of address to manage an imposition of this nature? None who knows the history of this extraordinary personage, will suspect that he wanted either the genius to contrive, or the resolution and dexterity to execute, any practicable expedient for promoting his grand design; which was no less than that extensive despotism, both religious and political, he at length acquir'd. Was it that he had too much honesty to concert and carry on so gross an artifice? Those who believe him to have been an impostor in pretending a divine mission, will hardly suspect him of such delicacy in the methods he would take to accomplish his aim. But in fact there is no colour of reason for such a suggestion. There was no prodigy, no miraculous interposition, which he hesitated to give out, however extravagant, when he saw it would contribute

to

to his ends. Prodiges of which they had no other evidence but his own allegation, he knew his adversaries might deny, but could not *disprove*. His scruples therefore, we may well conclude, proceeded not from *probity*, but *prudence*; and were solely against such miracles, as must be subjected to the scrutiny of other people's senses. Was it that miracle-working had before that time become so stale a device, that instead of gaining him the admiration of his countrymen, it would have expos'd him to their laughter and contempt? The most cursory perusal of the Alcoran, will, to every man of sense, afford an unanswerable confutation of this hypothesis \*. Lastly, was it that he liv'd in an enlighten'd

\* It is observable, that Mahomet was very much harass'd by the demands and reasonings of his opposers with regard to miracles. They were so far from despising this evidence, that they considered the power of working miracles as a never-failing badge of the prophetic office; and therefore often assur'd him,

enlighten'd age, and amongst a civiliz'd and learned people, who were too quick-sighted to be deceiv'd by tricks, which among barbarians might have produced the same effect. However, he oblig'd him, by the most solemn oaths and protestations, that they would submit implicitly to his guidance in religion, if he would once gratify them in this particular. This artful man, who does not seem to have been of the same opinion with the essayist, that it was an easy affair for cunning and impudence to impose, in a matter of this kind, on the credulity of the multitude, even tho' an ignorant and barbarous multitude, absolutely refus'd to subject his mission to so hazardous a trial. There is no subject he more frequently recurs to in his Alcoran, (or Koran, as some chuse to call it) being greatly interested to remove the doubts, which were rais'd in the minds of many by his disclaiming this power; a power which till then had ever been look'd upon as the prerogative of the prophets. The following are some of the reasons, with which he endeavours to satisfy the people on this head. 1st, The *sovereignty* of God, who is not to be call'd to account for what he gives or withholds. 2d, The *usefulness* of miracles, because every man is foreordain'd either to believe, or to remain in unbelief; and this decree no miracles could alter. 3d, The *experienced inefficacy* of miracles in former times. 4th, The *mercy* of God, who had denied them this evidence, because the sin of their incredulity,



the most astonishing effects. Quite the reverse. He liv'd in a barbarous age, and amongst an illiterate people, with whom, if with any, he had reason to believe the grossest deceit would prove successful.

What pity was it, that Mahomet had not a counsellor so deeply vers'd in human nature as the essayist, who could have assur'd him, that there needed but effrontery and enterprise; that with these auxiliaries he had reason to hope the most impudent pretences would be crown'd with success? The too timid prophet would doubtless have remonstrated against this spirited counsel, insisting, that it was one thing to satisfy friends, and another

incredulity, in case he had granted it, would have been so heinous, that he could not have respited or tolerated them any longer. 5th, The abuse to which miracles would have been expos'd from the infidels, who would have either charged them with imposture, or imputed them to magic. See the chapters — of cattle, — of thunder, — of Al Hejir, — of the night-journey, — of the spider, — of the prophets.

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thing to silence or convert *enemies*; that it was one thing to impose on mens *intellects*, and another thing to deceive their *senses*: that tho' an attempt of the last kind should succeed with some, yet if the fraud were detected by any, and he might expect that his adversaries would exert themselves in order to detect it, the whole mystery of craft would be divulged, his friends would become suspicious, and the spectators of such pretended miracles would become daily more prying and critical; that the consequences would infallibly prove fatal to the whole design; and that therefore such a cheat was on no account whatever to be risked. To this methinks I hear the other replying with some earnestness, 'Make but the trial, and you will certainly find, that what judgment, nay, and what senses your auditors have, they will renounce by principle in those sublime and mysterious subjects; they

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' will

guide.

‘ will imagine they see and hear what has  
‘ no reality, nay whatever you shall desire  
‘ that they should see and hear. Their cre-  
‘ dulity (forgive a freedom which my zeal  
‘ inspires) will increase your impudence,  
‘ and your impudence will overpower  
‘ their credulity. The smallest spark may  
‘ here kindle into the greatest flame, be-  
‘ cause the materials are always prepar’d  
‘ for it. The *avidum genus auricularum*  
‘ swallow greedily, without examination,  
‘ whatever soothes superstition and pro-  
‘ motes wonder.’ Whether the judicious  
reader will reckon that the prophet or his  
counsellor would have had the better in  
this debate, I shall not take upon me to  
decide. One perhaps (if I might be in-  
dulged in a conjecture) whose notions are  
founded in metaphysical refinements, or  
whose resolutions are influenced by ora-  
torical declamation, will incline to the o-  
pinion of the latter. One whose senti-  
ments



ments are the result of a practical knowledge of mankind, will probably subscribe to the judgment of the former, and will allow, that in this instance the CAPTAIN-GENERAL and PROPHET of *Islamism* acted the more prudent part.

Shall we then say, that it was a more *obscure theatre* on which JESUS CHRIST appeared? Were his spectators *more ignorant, or less adverse?* The contrary of both is manifest. It may indeed be affirmed with truth, that the religion of the wild Arabs was more repugnant to the doctrine of Mahomet, than the religious dogmas of the Jews were to those of Jesus. But we shall err egregiously, if we conclude thence, that to this repugnancy the repugnancy of disposition in the professors of those religions must be proportionate. 'Tis a fine observation of the most piercing and comprehensive genius, which hath appear'd in this age. That "tho' men have

“ a very strong tendency to idolatry, they  
“ are nevertheless but little attach’d to i-  
“ dolatrous religions; that tho’ they have  
“ no great tendency to spiritual ideas, they  
“ are nevertheless strongly attach’d to re-  
“ ligions which injoin the adoration of a  
“ spiritual being \*.” Hence an attach-  
ment in JEWS, CHRISTIANS, and MA-  
HOMETANS, to their respective religions,  
which was never display’d by POLY-  
THEISTS of any denomination. But its  
*spirituality* was not the only cause of adhe-  
rence which the Jews had to their reli-  
gion. Every physical, every moral motive  
concurr’d in that people to rivet their at-  
tachment, and make them oppose with  
violence, whatever bore the face of inno-  
vation. Their religion and polity were so  
blended as scarce to be distinguishable:  
this engag’d their *patriotism*. They were  
selected of God preferably to other na-

\* De l’esprit des loix, liv. 25. chap. 2.

tions :

tions: this inflam'd their *pride* \*. They were all under one spiritual head, the high-priest, and had their solemn festivals celebrated in one temple: this strengthened their *union*. The ceremonies of their public worship were magnificent: this flatter'd their *senses*. Those ceremonies also were numerous, and occupied a great part of their time: this, to all the other grounds of attachment, superadded the force of *habit*. On the contrary, the *simplicity* of the gospel, as well as the spirit of *humility*, and *moderation*, and *charity*, and *universality*, (if I may be allow'd that term) which it breath'd, could not fail to alarm a people of such a cast, and awaken, as in fact it did, the most furious opposition. Accordingly, Christianity had fifty times more success amongst idolaters, than it had among the Jews. I am there-

\* How great influence this motive had, appears from Acts xxii. 21. 22.



fore warranted to assert, that if the miracles of our Lord and his apostles had been an imposture, there could not, on the face of the earth, have been chosen for exhibiting them, a more unfavourable theatre than *Judea*. On the other hand, had it been any where practicable, by a display of false wonders, to make converts to a new religion, no where could a project of this nature have been conducted with greater probability of success than in *Arabia*. So much for the contrast there is betwixt the *Christian MESSIAH* and the ORPHAN CHARGE of *Abu Taleh*. So plain it is, that the *mosque* yields entirely the plea of miracles to the *synagogue* and the *church*.

BUT from HEATHENS and MANOMESTANS, let us turn our eyes to the CHRISTIAN world. The only object here, which merits our attention, as coming under

under the denomination of miracles ascrib'd to a new system, and as what may be thought to rival in credibility the miracles of the gospel, are those said to have been perform'd in the *primitive church*, after the times of the apostles, and after the finishing of the sacred canon. These will probably be ascrib'd to a new system, since Christianity, for some centuries, was not (as the phrase is) *established*, or (to speak more properly) *corrupted* by human authority; and since even after such establishment, there remained long in the empire a considerable mixture of idolaters. We have the greater reason here to consider this topic, as it hath of late been the subject of very warm dispute, and as the cause of Christianity itself (which I conceive is totally distinct) seems to have been strangely confounded with it. From the manner in which the argument hath been conducted, who, I may ask, would not conclude,

conclude, that both must stand or fall together? Nothing however can be more groundless, nothing more injurious to the religion of Jesus, than such a conclusion.

The learned writer who hath given rise to this controversy, not only acknowledges, that the falsity of the miracles mention'd by the fathers, is no evidence of the falsity of the miracles recorded in scripture, but that there is even a presumption in favour of these, arising from those forgeries, which he pretends to have detected \*. The justness of the remark contain'd in this acknowledgment, will appear more clearly from the following observations.

Let it be observed, first, that supposing numbers of people are ascertain'd of the truth of some miracles, whether their conviction arise from sense or testimony, it

\* Dr Middleton's prefatory discourse to his letter from Rome.

will



will surely be admitted as a consequence, that in all such persons, the presumption against miracles from uncommonness must be greatly diminished, in several perhaps totally extinguished.

Let it be observed, secondly, that if true miracles have been employ'd successfully in support of certain religious tenets, this success will naturally suggest to those, who are zealous of propagating favourite opinions in religion, to recur to the plea of miracles, as the most effectual expedient for accomplishing their end. This they will be encouraged to do on a double account: *first*, they know, that people from recent experience, are made to expect such a confirmation; *secondly*, they know, that in consequence of this experience, the incredibility, which is the principal obstruction to such an undertaking, is in a manner remov'd; and there is, on the contrary, as in such circumstances there certainly would

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be,

be, a promptness in the generality to receive them.

Add to these, that if we consult the history of mankind, or even our own experience, we shall be convinced, that hardly hath one wonderful event actually happen'd in any country, even where there have not been such visible temptations to forgery, which hath not given rise to false rumours of other events similar, but still more wonderful. Hardly hath any person or people atchiev'd some exploits truly extraordinary, to whom common report hath not quickly attributed many others, as extraordinary at least, if not impossible. As *same* may, in this respect, be compar'd to a *multiplying glass*, reasonable people almost always conclude in the same way concerning both; we know that there is not a real object corresponding to every appearance exhibited, at the same time we know

know that there must be some objects to give rise to the appearances.

I should therefore only beg of our adversaries, that, for argument's sake, they will suppose that the miracles related in the New Testament were really perform'd; and then, that they will candidly tell us, what, according to their notions of human nature, would, in all likelihood, have been the consequences. They must be very partial to a darling hypothesis, or little acquainted with the world, who will hesitate to own, that, on this supposition, 'tis not barely probable, but certain, that for a few endow'd with the miraculous power, there would soon have arisen numbers of pretenders; that from some miracles well attested, occasion would have been taken to propagate innumerable false reports. If so, with what colour of justice can the detection of many spurious reports among the primitive Christians be



consider'd as a presumption against those miracles, the reality of which is the most plausible, nay the only plausible account that can be given of the origin of such reports? The presumption is too evidently on the opposite side to need illustration.

'Tis not my intention here to patronize either side of the question which the Doctor's *Free inquiry* hath occasioned. All that concerns my argument is, barely to evince, and this I imagine hath been evinced, that, granting the Doctor's plea to be well founded, there is no presumption arising hence, which tends in the lowest degree to discredit the miracles recorded in holy writ; nay, that there is a contrary presumption. In further confirmation of this truth, let me ask, Were there ever, in any region of the globe, any similar pretensions to miraculous powers, before that memorable *era*, the publication of the gospel? Let me ask again, Since those pretensions ceased,

ceased, hath it ever been in the power of the most daring enthusiast, to revive them any where in favour of a new system? Authentic miracles will, for a time, give a currency to counterfeits; but as the former become less frequent, the latter become more suspected, till at length they are treated with general contempt, and disappear. The danger then is, lest men, ever prone to extremes, run to as great a pitch of incredulity, as formerly of credulity. *Laziness*, the true source of both, always inclines us to admit or reject in the *gross*, without entering on the irksome task of considering things in *detail*. In the first instance, knowing some such events to be true, they *admit all without examination*; in the second, knowing some to be false, they *reject all without examination*. A procedure this, which, however excusable in the unthinking herd, is altogether unworthy a philosopher.

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But to return: It may be thought, that the claim to miracles in the early ages of the church, continued too long to be solely supported on the credit of those perform'd by our Lord and his apostles. In order to account for this, it ought to be attended to, that in the course of some centuries, the situation of affairs, with regard to religion, was really inverted. Education, and even superstition, and bigotry, and popularity, which the miracles of Christ and his apostles had to encounter, came gradually to be on the side of those wonders, said to have been perform'd in after times. If they were potent *enemies*, and such as, we have reason to believe, nothing but the force of truth could vanquish; they were also potent *allies*, and may well be suppos'd able to give a temporary triumph to falsehood, especially when it had few or no enemies to combat. But in discoursing on the prodigies



digies said to have been perform'd in primitive times, I have been insensibly carried from the point, to which I propos'd in this section to confine myself. From inquiring into miracles ascrib'd to new systems, I have proceeded to those pleaded in confirmation of systems previously establish'd, and generally receiv'd.

LEAVING so remote a period, I propose, lastly, to inquire, whether, since that time, any heresiarch whatever, any founder of a new sect, or publisher of a new system, hath pretended to miraculous powers. If the essayist had known of any such pretender, he surely would have mention'd him. But as he hath not afforded us any light on this subject, I shall just recall to the remembrance of my reader, those persons who, either as innovators or reformers, have made some figure in the church. They were the persons from  
whom,

whom, if from any, a plea of this kind might naturally have been expected; especially at a time when Europe was either plunged in barbarism, or but beginning to emerge out of it.

Was ever then this high prerogative, the power of miracles, claim'd or exercis'd by the founders of the sects of the Waldenses and Albigenes? Did Wickliff in England pretend to it? Did Hufs or Jerom in Bohemia? To come nearer modern times, Did Luther in Germany, Zuinglius in Switzerland, Calvin in France, or any other of the reformers, advance this plea? Do such of them as are authors, mention in their writings any miracles they perform'd, or appeal to them as the evidences of their doctrine? Do contemporary historians alledge, that they challenged the faith of their auditors, in consequence of such supernatural powers? I admit, if they did, that their miracles  
might

might be ascrib'd to a new system. For tho' they pretended only to re-establish the Christian institution, in its native purity, extirpating those pernicious weeds, which false philosophy had introduced into the doctrinal part, and Pagan superstition into the moral and the ritual; yet as the religion they inculcated, greatly differ'd from the faith and worship of the times, it might, in this respect, be denominated a new system; and would be encounter'd by all the violence and prejudice, which novelties in religion never fail to excite. Not that the want of real miracles was a presumption against the truth of their doctrine. The God of nature, who is the God of Christians, does nothing in vain. No new revelation was pretended to; consequently there was no occasion for such supernatural support. They appeal'd to the revelation formerly bestow'd, and by all parties acknowledg'd, as to the proper

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rule



rule in this controversy : they appeal'd to the reason of mankind as the judge ; and the reason of mankind was a competent judge of the conformity of their doctrine to this unerring rule.

But how, upon the author's principles, shall we account for this moderation in the reformers ? Were they, in his judgment, calm inquirers into truth ? Were they dispassionate reasoners in defence of it ? Far otherwise. He tells us, " They " may safely be pronounced to have been " universally inflam'd with the highest enthusiasm \*." And doubtless we cannot expect from this hand a more amiable picture of their disciples. May not we then, in our turn, safely pronounce, this writer himself being judge, that for a man to imagine he sees what hath no reality, to impose in this manner not only on his own understanding, but even on his ex-

\* History of Great Britain, James I. chap. 1.

ternal senses, is a pitch of delusion higher than the highest enthusiasm can produce, and is only to be imputed to downright frenzy \*?

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\* Perhaps it will be pleaded, that the working of miracles was consider'd by the leaders in the reformation as a Popish artifice, and as therefore worthy of being discarded with the other abuses which Popery had introduced. That this was not the light in which miracles were view'd by Luther, who justly possesses the first place in the list of reformers, is evident from the manner in which he argues against Muncer, the apostle of the Anabaptists. This man, without ordination, had assum'd the office of a Christian pastor. Against this conduct Luther remonstrates, as being, in his judgment, an usurpation of the sacred function. "Let him be asked," says he, "Who made him a teacher of religion? If he answers, God; let him prove it by a visible *miracle*: for 'tis by such signs that God declares himself, when he gives an extraordinary mission." When this argument was afterward retorted on himself by the Romanists, who desir'd to know how his own vocation, originally limited and dependent, had become not only unlimited, but quite independent of the hierarchy, from which he had receiv'd it; his reply was, That the *intrepidity*, with which he had been enabled to brave so many dangers, and the *success* with which his enterprize had been crown'd, ought to be regarded as miracu-

Since the world began, there hath not appear'd a more general propension to the wildest fanaticism, a greater degree of credulity in every claim to the illapses of the Holy Spirit, or a more thorough contempt of all establish'd modes of worship, than appear'd in this island about the middle of the last century. 'Tis astonishing, that when the minds of men were intoxicated with enthusiasm; when every

lous: And indeed most of his followers were of this opinion. But whether this opinion was erroneous, or whether the argument against Muncer was conclusive, 'tis not my business to inquire. Thus much is evident from the story: *first*, That this reformer, far from rejecting miracles as a Romish trick, acknowledged, that in some religious questions, they are the only medium of proof; *secondly*, That notwithstanding this, he never attempted, by a show of miracles, to impose on the senses of his hearers; (if they were deceiv'd in thinking that his success and magnanimity were miraculous, 'twas not their senses, but their understanding that was deceiv'd) *lastly*, That the Anabaptists themselves, tho' perhaps the most outrageous fanatics that ever existed, did not pretend to the power of working miracles.

—*Sieidan lib. 5. Luth. De votis monast. &c. Epist. ad Frid. Sax. Ducem. ap. Chytræum.*

new



new pretender to divine illuminations was quickly furrounded by a crowd of followers, and his most incoherent effusions greedily swallow'd as the dictates of the Holy Ghost; that in such a Babel of sectaries, none are to be found, who advanced a claim to the power of working miracles; a claim which, in the author's opinion, tho' false, is easily supported, and wonderfully successful, especially among enthusiasts. Yet to Mr Hume himself, who hath written the history of that period, and who will not be accus'd of neglecting to mark the extravagancies effected by enthusiasm, I appeal for the truth of this remark.

Will it be alledged as an exception, that one or two frantic people among the Quakers, not the leaders of the party, did actually pretend to such a power? Let it be remember'd, that this conduct had no other consequences, but to bring upon the pretenders such a general contempt, as in  
that

that fanatical and gloomy age, the most unintelligible jargon or glaring nonsense would never have been able to produce.

Will it be urged by the essayist, that even in the beginning of the present century, this plea was reviv'd in Britain by the French prophets, a set of poor visionaries, who, by the barbarity with which they had been treated in their own country, had been wrought up to madness, before they took refuge in this? I must beg leave to remind him, that it is manifest, from the history of those delirious and unhappy creatures, that by no part of their conduct did they so effectually open the eyes of mankind naturally credulous, discredit their own inspirations, and ruin their cause, as by this, not less foolish than presumptuous pretence. Accordingly they are perhaps the only sect, which hath sprung up so lately, made so great a bustle for a while, and which is nevertheless

less at this day totally extinct. It deserves also to be remarked concerning this people, that tho' they were mad enough to imagine that they could restore a dead man to life; nay tho' they proceeded so far, as to determine and announce beforehand the day and the hour of his resurrection; yet none of them were so distracted, as to imagine, that they had seen him rise; not one of them afterward pretended, that their prediction had been fulfill'd. Thus even a frenzy, which had quite disorder'd their intellects, could not in this instance overpower their senses.

UPON the whole, therefore, till some contrary example is produced, I may warrantably conclude,—that the religion of the BIBLE is the only religion extant, which claims to have been founded on the evidence of *miracles*;—that tho', in different ages and countries, numberless enthusiasts



enthusiasts have arisen, extremely few have dared to advance this plea;—that wherever any have had the boldness to recur to it, it hath prov'd the bane, and not the support, of their cause. Thus it hath been evinced, as was propos'd, that there is no presumption arising from the *history of the world*, which can in the least invalidate the argument from miracles, in defence of Christianity.

### SECTION III.

*No miracles recorded by historians of other religions are subversive of the evidence arising from the miracles wrought in proof of Christianity, or can be consider'd as contrary testimony.*

‘ **W**HY is a miracle regarded as evidence of a religious doctrine?’  
Or, ‘What connection is there between an  
‘ act

‘ act of power admitted to be supernatural,  
 ‘ and the truth of a proposition pronoun-  
 ‘ ced by the person who exerts that power?’

These are questions, which some of our infidels have exulted in as unanswerable: and they are questions, which ’tis proper to examine a little; not so much for their own sake, as because a satisfactory answer to them may throw light on the subject of this section.

A man, I suppose, of an unblemished character, advanceth doctrines in religion, unknown before, but not in themselves apparently impious or absurd. We interrogate him about the manner wherein he attain’d the knowledge of those doctrines. He affirms, That by no process of reasoning, nor in any other natural way, did he discover them; that, on the contrary, they were reveal’d to him by the Spirit of God. It must be own’d, there lies a very strong presumption against the truth of what he

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says;

says; and 'tis of consequence to inquire, whence that presumption ariseth. It is not primarily from any doubt of the man's integrity. If the fact he related, were of an ordinary nature, the reputation he has hitherto maintain'd, would secure him from being suspected of an intended deceit. It is not from any absurdity or immoral tendency we perceive in the doctrine itself. It ariseth principally, if not solely, from these two circumstances, the extreme uncommonness of such a revelation, and the great facility with which people of strong fancy may, in this particular, impose upon themselves. The man, I suppose, acquaints us further, that God, when he communicated to him the truths he publishes, communicated also the power of working miracles, such as, of giving sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf, of raising the dead, and making whole the maimed. 'Tis evident, that we have  
precisely



precisely the same presumption against his being endued with such a power, as against his having obtained such a revelation. Two things are asserted: there is one presumption, and but one, against them; and it equally lies against both. Whatever proves either assertion, removes the only presumption which hinders our belief of the other. The man, I suppose, lastly, performs the miracles before us, which he said he was commission'd to perform. We can no longer doubt of a supernatural communication. We have now all the evidence which the integrity of the person could give us, as to any ordinary event attested by him, that the doctrine he delivers as from God, is from God, and therefore true.

Nay, we have more evidence than for any common fact, vouched by a person of undoubted probity. As God is both

almighty and all-wise, if he hath bestow'd on any so uncommon a privilege, 'tis highly probable, that it is bestow'd for promoting some end uncommonly important. And what more important end than to reveal to men that which may be conducive to their present and eternal happiness? It may be said, That, at most, it can only prove the interposal of some power superior to human: the being who interposeth is perhaps a bad being, and intends to deceive us. This, it may be allowed, is *possible*; but the other is *probable*. For, *first*, From the light of nature, we have no positive evidence of the existence of such intermediate beings, good or bad. Their existence is therefore only possible. Of the existence and perfections of God, we have the highest moral assurance. *Secondly*, If there were such beings, that raising the dead, and giving sight to the blind, should come within the verge of  
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of their power, is also but possible; that they are within the sphere of omnipotence is certain. *Thirdly*, Whatever seems to imply a suspension of any of the established laws of nature, we may presume, with great appearance of reason, proceeds from the author of nature, either *immediately*, or, which amounts to the same thing, *mediately*; that is, by the intervention of some agent impower'd by him. To all these there will also accrue presumptions, not only, as was hinted already, from the character of the preacher, but from the apparent tendency of the doctrine, and from the effect it produceth on those who receive it. The connection now between the miracle and the doctrine is obvious. The miracle removes the improbability of a supernatural communication, of which communication it is in fact an irrefragable evidence. This improbability, which was the only obstacle, being removed, the doctrine



trine hath, at least, all the evidence of a common fact, attested by a man of known virtue and good sense.

In order to illustrate this further, I shall recur to the instance I have already had occasion to consider, of the Dutchman and the King of Siam. I shall suppose, that, besides the account given by the former of the freezing of water in Holland, he had inform'd the prince of the astonishing effects produced by gunpowder, with which the latter had been entirely unacquainted. Both accounts appear to him alike incredible, or, if you please, absolutely impossible. Some time afterward, the Dutchman gets imported into the kingdom a sufficient quantity of gunpowder, with the necessary artillery. He informs the monarch of this acquisition; who having permitted him to make experiments on some of his cattle and buildings, perceives, with inexpressible amazement,

ment, that all the European had told him, of the celerity and violence with which this destructive powder operates, is strictly conformable to truth. I ask any considerate person, Would not this be enough to restore the stranger to the Indian's good opinion, which, I suppose, his former experienced honesty had intitled him to? Would it not remove the incredibility of the account he had given of the freezing of water in northern countries? Yet, if abstractly consider'd, what connection is there between the effects of gunpowder and the effects of cold? But the presumption arising from miracles, in favour of the doctrine published by the performer, as divinely inspired, must be incomparably stronger; since from what hath been said, it appears to have several peculiar circumstances, which add weight to it. 'Tis evident, then, that miracles are a proper proof, and perhaps the only proper

proper proof, of a revelation from Heaven. But 'tis also evident, that miracles may be wrought for other purposes, and may not be intended as proofs of any doctrine whatsoever.

THUS much being premised, I shall examine another very curious argument of the essayist: "There is no testimony," says he, "for any prodigy, that is not opposed by an infinite number of witnesses; so that not only the miracle destroys the credit of the testimony, but even the testimony destroys itself \*." In order to illustrate this strange position, he observes, that, "in matters of religion, whatever is different is contrary; and that it is impossible the religions of ancient Rome, of Turkey, of Siam, and of China, should all of them be established on any solid foundation. Every mi-

\* p. 190. &c.



“ racle therefore pretended to have been  
 “ wrought in any of these religions, (and  
 “ all of them abound in miracles) as its  
 “ direct scope is to establish the particular  
 “ system to which it is attributed, so it  
 “ has the same force, tho’ more indirectly,  
 “ to overthrow every other system. In  
 “ destroying a rival system, it likewise de-  
 “ stroys the credit of those miracles, on  
 “ which that system was established; so  
 “ that all the prodigies of different reli-  
 “ gions are to be regarded as contrary  
 “ facts, and the evidences of these prod-  
 “ gies, whether weak or strong, as oppo-  
 “ site to each other.” Never did an au-  
 thor more artfully avail himself of indefi-  
 nite expressions. With what admirable  
 sleight does he vary his phrases, so as to  
 make the inadvertent reader look upon  
 them as synonymous, when in fact their  
 significations are totally distinct? Thus  
 what, by a most extraordinary idiom, is

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called

called at first, 'miracles wrought in a religion,' we are next to regard, as 'miracles attributed to a particular system,' and lastly, as 'miracles, the direct scope of which is to establish that system.' Every body, I will venture to say, in beginning to read the sentence, if he forms any notion of what the author means by a 'miracle wrought in a religion,' understands it barely as a 'miracle wrought among those who profess a particular religion,' the words appearing to be us'd in the same latitude, as when we call the traditional tales current among the Jews, tho' they should have no relation to religion, Jewish tales; and those in like manner Mahometan or Pagan tales, which are current among Mahometans or Pagans. Such a miracle, the reader, ere he is aware, is brought to consider as a miracle attributed to a particular system; nay further, as 'a miracle, the direct scope of which

'which is to establish that system.' Yet nothing can be conceiv'd more different than the meaning of those expressions, which are here jumbled together as equivalent.

'Tis plain, that all the miracles of which there is any record, come under the first denomination. They are all suppos'd to have been wrought before men, or among men; and where-ever there are men, there is religion of some kind or other. Perhaps too all may, in a very *improper* sense, be attributed to a religious system. They all imply an interruption of the ordinary course of nature. Such an interruption, where-ever it is observed, will be ascrib'd to the agency of those divinities that are ador'd by the observers, and so may be said to be attributed by them to their own system. But where are the miracles (those of holy writ excepted) of which you can say with propriety, it is their direct



scope to establish a particular system? Must we not then be strangely blinded by the charm of a few ambiguous terms, if we are made to confound things so widely different? Yet this confusion is the very basis, on which the author founds his reasoning, and rears this tremendous conclusion; That 'a miracle of Mahomet, or any 'of his successors,' and, by parity of reason, a miracle of Christ, or any of his apostles, 'is refuted (as if it had been mentioned, and had, in express terms, been 'contradicted) by the testimony of Titus 'Livius, Plutarch, Tacitus, and of all the 'authors, Chinese, Grecian, and Roman 'Catholic, who have related any miracles 'in their particular religions.' Here all the miracles, that have been related by men of different religions, are blended, as coming under the common denomination of miracles, the direct scope of which was to establish those particular religious systems; an insinuation,

insinuation, in which there is not even the shadow of truth.

That we may be satisfied on this point, let the following observations concerning the miracles of profane history be attended to. *First*, Many facts are related as miraculous, where we may admit the fact, without acknowledging the miracle. Instances of this kind we have in relations concerning comets, eclipses, meteors, earthquakes, and suchlike. *Secondly*, The miracles may be admitted as genuine, and the manner in which historians account for them, rejected as absurd. The one is a matter of testimony, the other of conjecture. In this a man is influenced by education, by prejudices, by received opinions. In every country, as was observ'd already, men will recur to the theology of the place, for the solution of every phenomenon suppos'd miraculous. But, that it was the scope of the miracle to support the

the theology, is one thing; and that fanciful men thought they discover'd in the theology the causes of the miracle, is another. The inhabitants of Lystra accounted, from the principles of their own religion, for the miracle perform'd in their city by Paul and Barnabas \*. Was it therefore the scope of that miracle to support the Lycaonian religion? *Thirdly*, Many miracles are recorded, as produced directly by Heaven, without the ministration of men: by what construction are these discover'd to be proofs of a particular system? Yet these also, where-ever they happen, will be accounted for by the natives of the country, from the principles of their own superstition. Had any of the Pagan citizens escap'd the ruin in which Sodom was miraculously involved, they would doubtless have fought for the cause of this destruction in the established

\* Acts xiv. 8. &c.



mode of polytheism, and would probably have imputed it to the vengeance of some of their deities, incurr'd perhaps by the neglect of some very frivolous ceremony. Would it therefore have been the scope of the miracle to confirm this nonsense? *Fourthly*, Even miracles said to have been perform'd by a man, are no evidences of the truth of that man's opinions; such, I mean, as he pretends not to have receiv'd by revelation, but by the exercise of reason, by education, or by information from other men; no more than a man's being endow'd with bodily strength greater than ordinary, would prove him to be superior to others in his mental faculties. I conclude with declaring, that if instances shall be produced, of miracles wrought by men of probity, in proof of doctrines which they affirm to have been reveal'd to them from Heaven, and which are repugnant to the doctrine of the Bible, then I shall think

think it equitable to admit, that religious miracles contradict one another. Then will reasonable people be reduced to the dilemma, either of disproving the allegations on one side, or of acknowledging that miracles can be no evidence of revelation. No attempt however hath as yet been made by any writer to produce an instance of this kind.

‘ But will nothing less satisfy?’ replies the author. ‘ Will not the predictions of  
‘ augurs and oracles, and the intimations  
‘ said to have been given by the gods or  
‘ fairs in dreams and visions, of things  
‘ not otherwise knowable by those to  
‘ whom they were thus intimated; will  
‘ not these, and suchlike prodigies, serve  
‘ in some degree as evidence?’ As evidence of what? Not of any religious principles convey’d at the same time by revelation; ’tis not pretended, that there were any such: but as evidence of principles,  
which

which had been long before entertain'd, and which were originally imbib'd from education, and from education only. That the evidence here, supposing the truth of the facts, is at best but very indirect, and by no means on the same footing with that of the miracles recorded in the gospel, might be easily evinced, if there were occasion. But there is in reality no occasion, since there is no such evidence of the facts as can justly intitle them to our notice. Let it be remember'd, that, in the fourth section of the first part, it was shewn, that there is the greatest disparity, in respect of evidence, betwixt miracles perform'd in proof of a religion *to be* established, and in *contradiction* to opinions generally receiv'd; and miracles perform'd, on the contrary, in support of a religion *already* established, and in *confirmation* of opinions generally receiv'd; that, in the former case, there is the strongest pre-

Z

sumption



sumption *for* the miracles, in the latter *against* them. Let it also be remember'd, that in the preceding section it was shown, that the religion of the Bible is the only religion extant, which claims to have been founded on the evidence of miracles; that this prerogative neither the Pagan religion, the Mahometan, nor the Roman-Catholic, can, with any appearance of reason, arrogate; and that, by consequence, there is one of the strongest presumptions possible *for* the miracles of the gospel, which is not only wanting in the miracles of other religions, but which is contrasted by the strongest presumption possible *against* these miracles. And tho' this presumption should not, in all cases, be accounted absolutely insuperable, we must at least say, it gives an immense superiority to the proofs of Christianity. 'Twere an endless and a fruitless task, to canvass particularly the evidence of all the pretended miracles either

ther of Paganism or Popery, (for on this head Mahometism is much more modest) but as the author hath selected some, which he considers as the best attested, of both religions, these shall be examin'd severally in the two subsequent sections. From this examination a tolerable judgment may be form'd concerning the pretensions of these two species of superstition.

But from what hath been already said, it is evident, that the contrariety which the author pretends to have discover'd in the miracles said to have been wrought, as he expresseth it, in different religions, vanishes entirely on a close inspection, especially when compar'd with the miracles of the gospel; the transcendent lustre of which they are by no means fitted to endure. He is even sensible of this himself; and, as is customary with orators, the more inconclusive his reasons are, so much the more positive are his assertions. "This

“ argument,” says he, “ may appear over  
“ subtile and refin’d;” indeed so subtile  
and refin’d, that it is invisible altogether;  
“ *but* — is not *in reality* different from  
“ the reasoning of a judge, who supposes  
“ that the credit of two witnesses main-  
“ taining a crime against any one, is de-  
“ stroy’d by the testimony of two others,  
“ who affirm him to have been two hun-  
“ dred leagues distant, at the same instant  
“ when the crime is said to have been  
“ committed.” After the particle *but*,  
with which this clause begins, the reader  
naturally expects such an explication of  
the argument, as will convince him, that  
tho’ *subtile* and *refin’d*, it hath *solidity* and  
*strength*. Instead of this, he hath only  
the author’s *word* warranting it to be good  
to all intents: “ But *is not in reality* dif-  
“ ferent,” &c. The analogy between his  
*example* and his *argument* seems to be but  
very distant; I shall therefore, without a-  
ny



ny comment, leave it with the reader as I find it.

THUS it appears, that, for aught the author hath as yet prov'd, no miracles recorded by historians of other religions are subversive of the evidence arising from the miracles wrought in proof of Christianity, or can justly be considered as contrary testimony.

#### SECTION IV.

*Examination of the PAGAN miracles mentioned by Mr Hume.*

SHOULD one read attentively the *Essay on miracles*, and consider it solely as a philosophical disquisition on an abstract question, like most of the other pieces in the same collection; he could not fail to wonder, what had induced the author so suddenly

suddenly to change sides in the debate, and, by doing so, to contradict himself in terms the most express. Does he not, in the latter part of that performance, as warmly contend for the *reality* of some miracles, as he had pleaded in the former part, for the *impossibility* of all? 'Tis true, he generally concludes concerning those, that they are 'gross and palpable falsehoods.' But this serves only to render his conduct the more mysterious, as that conclusion is always preceded by an attempt to evince, that we have the greatest reason to receive them as 'certain and infallible truths.' Nay, so entirely doth his *zeal* make him forget even his most positive assertions, (and what inconsistencies may not be dreaded from an excess of *zeal*!) that he shows minutely, we have those very evidences for the miracles he is pleas'd to patronize, which, he had strenuously

muously argued, were not to be found in support of any miracles whatever.

“ There is not to be found,” he affirms \*, “ in all history, a miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestion’d good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose, in case of being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time attesting facts perform’d in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable.” We need only turn over a few pages of the *Essay*, and we shall find the author taking great pains to convince us, that all these cir-

\* p. 183.

cumstances



cumstances concurr'd in support of certain miracles, which, notwithstanding his *general resolution*, he has thought fit to honour with a very particular attention.

He has not indeed told us *how many* witnesses, in his way of reckoning, will constitute 'a sufficient number;' but for some miracles which he relates, he gives us *clouds* of witnesses, one cloud succeeding another: for the Molinists, who tried to discredit them, "soon found themselves "overwhelm'd by a cloud of *new* witnesses, one hundred and twenty in number \*." As to the character of the witnesses, "most of them were persons of credit and substance in Paris †;" again, those miracles "were attested by witnesses "of credit and distinction, before judges "of unquestion'd integrity ‡;" and, "they "were prov'd by witnesses, before the officialty or bishop's court of Paris, under

\* p. 197. in the note.

† ib.

‡ p. 195.

"the

“ the eyes of Cardinal Noailles, whose  
 “ character for integrity and capacity was  
 “ never contested even by his enemies \*;”  
 again, “ the secular clergy of France, par-  
 “ ticularly the rectors or *curés* of Paris,  
 “ give testimony to these impostures, than  
 “ whom no clergy are more celebrated for  
 “ strictness of life and manners †.” Once  
 more, one principal witness, “ *Monsieur de*  
 “ *Montgeron*, was counsellor or judge of  
 “ the parliament of Paris, a man of figure  
 “ and character ‡;” another “ no less a  
 “ man than the *Duc de Chatillon*, a Duke  
 “ and Peer of France, of the highest rank  
 “ and family ||.” ’Tis strange, if *credit*,  
 and *substance*, and *distinction*, and *capacity*,  
 are not sufficient securities to us, that the  
 witnesses were not ‘ themselves deluded;’  
 ’tis strange, if *uncontested integrity*, and *e-*  
*minent strictness* of life and manners, can-

\* p. 196. in the note.

† p. 199. in the note.

‡ p. 195. in the note.

|| p. 199. in the note.

not remove 'all suspicion of any design in  
 ' them to deceive others;' 'tis strange, if  
 one who was *counsellor* of the parliament  
 of Paris, a man of figure and character,  
 and if another who was a *Duke* and Peer  
 of France, of the highest rank and family,  
 had not 'a great deal to lose, in case of be-  
 ' ing detected in any falsehood?' nay, and  
 if all those witnesses of *credit* and *distinc-*  
*tion*, 'had not also a great deal to lose;'  
 " since the Jesuits, a learned body, sup-  
 " ported by the civil magistrate, were de-  
 " termin'd enemies to those opinions, in  
 " whose favour the miracles were said  
 " to have been wrought \*;" and since  
 " *Monsieur* Herault, the lieutenant *de po-*  
 " *lice*, of whose great reputation, all who  
 " have been in France about that time,  
 " have heard; and whose vigilance, pene-  
 " tration, activity, and extensive intelli-  
 " gence, have been much talk'd of; since

\* p. 195.

" this



“ this magistrate, who by the nature of  
 “ his office is almost absolute, was invest-  
 “ ed with full powers on purpose to sup-  
 “ press these miracles, and frequently sei-  
 “ zed and examin’d the witnesses and sub-  
 “ jects of them; though he could never  
 “ reach any thing satisfactory against  
 “ them \*.” As to the only remaining cir-  
 cumstance, their being ‘ perform’d in a  
 ‘ public manner, and in a celebrated part  
 ‘ of the world,’ this concurred also. They  
 were perform’d, we are told, “ in a learn-  
 “ ed age, and on the most eminent theatre  
 “ that is now in the world †:” besides,  
 “ twenty-two rectors or *cures* of Paris,  
 “ with infinite earnestness, pressed the  
 “ Archbishop, an enemy to the Jansenists,  
 “ to examine those miracles, which they  
 “ assert to be known to the whole world,  
 “ and indisputably certain ‡.”

\* p. 197. in the note.

† p. 195.

‡ p. 196. in the note.

Thus the essayist hath laid us under the disagreeable necessity of inferring, that he is either very rash in his general assertions, or useth very great amplification in his particular narrations. Perhaps in both inferences, we shall find, upon inquiry, that there is some truth. In his *History of Great Britain*, he gives us notice \*, that he addressed himself "to a more distant posterity, than will ever be reach'd by any local or temporary theology." Why did he not likewise, in writing the *Essays*, entertain this grand idea? It would have been of use to him. It would have prevented his falling into those inconsistencies, which his too great attention and antipathy to what he calls a *local or temporary theology*, only could occasion; and which, when that theology, according to his hypothesis, shall be extinct, and when all our religious controversies shall be forgot-

\* James I. ch. 2.

ten, must appear unaccountable and ridiculous. People will not then have the means of discovering, what is so obvious to us his cotemporaries, that he only assumes the appearance of an advocate for some miracles, which are disbeliev'd by the generality of Protestants, his countrymen, in order, by the comparison, to vivify the miracles of sacred writ, which are acknowledged by them.

BUT to descend to particulars, I shall begin with considering those miracles, for which the author is indebted to the ancient Pagans. First, in order to convince us, how easy a matter it is for cunning and impudence to impose by false mirales on the credulity of barbarians, he introduces the story of Alexander of Pontus \*. The justness of the account he gives of this impostor from Lucian, I shall not dispute.

\* p. 188. &c.

But



But that it may appear, how little the Christian religion is affected by this relation, notwithstanding some insinuations he hath intermixt with it, I shall make the following remarks.

It is of importance to know, what was the profession of this once so famous, tho' now forgotten Paphlagonian. Was he a publisher of strange gods? No \*. Was he the founder of a new system in religion? No. What was he then? He was no other than a professed fortune-teller. What

\* The learned and judicious author of the *Observations on the conversion and apostleship of Saint Paul*, hath inadvertently said of Alexander, that he introduced a *new god* into Pontus. The truth is, he only exhibited a reproduction of *Esculapius*, a well-known deity in those parts, to whom he gave indeed the *new name* GLYCON. In this there was nothing unsuitable to the genius of the mythology. Accordingly, we do not find, that either the priests, or the people, were in the least alarm'd for the religion of the country, or ever charged Alexander as an *innovator* in religious matters. On the contrary, the greatest enemies he had to encounter, were not the religionists, but the latitudinarians.

were

were the arts by which he carried on this gainful trade? The essayist justly remarks, that 'it was a wise policy in him, to lay ' the first scene of his impostures in a coun- ' try, where the people were extremely igno- ' rant and stupid, and ready to swallow the ' grossest delusion.' For, " had Alexander " fix'd his residence at Athens, the philo- " sopher of that renown'd mart of learn- " ing, had immediately spread thro' the " whole Roman empire their sense of the " matter; which, being supported by so " great authority, and display'd by all the " force of reason and eloquence, had en- " tirely open'd the eyes of mankind." I shall beg leave to remark another instance of good policy in him. He attempted not to gain the veneration of the multitude by opposing, but by adopting their religious prejudices. His whole plan of deceit was founded in the established superstition. The author himself will acknowledge, it would

would have been extreme folly in him to have acted otherwise: and all the world, I believe, will agree in thinking, that, in that case, he could not have had the smallest probability of success. What were the miracles he wrought? I know of none, unless we will dignify with that name, some feats of legerdemain, perform'd mostly by candle-light; which, in many parts of Europe, we may daily see equall'd, nay far exceeded, by those of modern jugglers. Add to these some oracles he pronounced, concerning which, if we may form a judgment from the account and specimen given us by Lucian, we should conclude, that, like most other Heathen oracles, they were unintelligible, or equivocal, or false. Before whom did he exhibit his wonders? Before none, if he could help it, that were not thorough believers in the popular system. His nocturnal mysteries were always introduced with an AVAUNT to A-

*theists,*



*theists, Christians, and Epicureans*: and indeed it was dangerous for any such to be present at them. The author says, that, “from his ignorant Paphlagonians, he “was enabled to proceed to the inlisting “of votaries among the Grecian philosophers.” On what authority he advances this, I have not been able to discover. He adds, “and men of the most eminent “rank and distinction in Rome.” Lucian mentions one man of rank, Rutilianus, among the votaries of the prophet; an honest man he calls him, but at the same time the weakest, the most superstitious that ever liv’d. As to the military expedition, which one would imagine from Mr Hume’s expression, the Emperor had resolved on, in consequence of the encouragement which the delusive prophecies of this impostor gave him, we find, on the contrary, it was undertaken, before those prophecies were uttered. But further,

B b

Did

Did Alexander risk any thing in assuming the character of the *interpreter* of ESCULAPIUS? Did he lose, or did he suffer any thing in defence of it? Quite the reverse. He enriched himself by this most ingenious occupation. I shall say nothing of the picture which Lucian gives of his morals, of the many artifices which he used, or of the atrocious crimes which he perpetrated. It must be own'd, that the principal scope for calumny and detraction is in what concerns the private life and moral character. Lucian was an enemy, and, by his own account, had received the highest provocation. But I avoid every thing, on this topic, that can admit a question.

Where, I would gladly know, lies the resemblance between this impostor and the first publishers of the gospel? Every one, on the most superficial review, may discover, that, in all the material circumstances, they are perfect contrasts. There appears

not

not therefore to be great danger in the remark which the author hath affix'd to this relation, as the sting: "Tho' *much to be wish'd*, it does not always happen, that every *Alexander* meets with a *Lucian*, ready to expose and detect his impostures." Left the full import of this emphatical clause should not be apprehended, the author hath been still more explicit in the note: "It may here perhaps be objected, that I proceed rashly, and form my notions of Alexander, merely from the account given of him by Lucian, a profess'd enemy. *It were indeed to be wish'd*, that some of the accounts published by his followers and accomplices had remain'd. The opposition and contrast betwixt the character and conduct of the same man, as drawn by a friend or an enemy, is as strong, even in common life, much more in these religious matters, as that betwixt any



“two men in the world, betwixt Alexander and Saint Paul for instance.” Who can forbear to lament the uncommon distress of an author, oblig’d every moment to recur to unavailing wishes? Mr Hume, however, in this calamitous situation, solaceth himself, as well as he can, by supposing what he cannot assert. He supposeth what would have been the case, if his wishes could have been gratified; and artfully insinuates, in this manner, to his readers, that if we had the character and conduct of the apostle, delineated by as able an enemy as Lucian, we should find the picture as ugly as that of Alexander.

Let us then for once suppose, with the author, that such an enemy had undertaken the history of Paul of Tarsus. I can easily conceive what a different representation we should, in that case, have had, of the mental endowments and moral disposition, as well as of the inducements and  
 views

views of this Christian missionary. I can conceive also, that both his actions and discourses might have been strangely disfigured. But if the biographer had maintain'd any regard, I say not, to truth, but to probability; there are some things, we may be absolutely certain, he would never have advanced. He would not surely have said of Paul, that he was by profession a cunning man, or *conjurer*; one who, for a piece of money, either told people their fortunes, or taught them how to recover stolen goods. He would not, I suppose, have pretended, that where-ever the apostle went, he, in order to gain the populace, *flatter'd* their superstition, and founded all his pretensions on the popular system. He would not have alledged, that Paul *enriched* himself, or that he could ever have the prospect of enriching himself, by his vocation; nay, or that he risked nothing, or suffer'd nothing, by it. He  
could

could not have said concerning him, that he *declin'd* the audience or scrutiny of men, whose opinions in religion differ'd from those on which his mission was founded. He durst not have imputed to him the *wise policy* of laying the scene of his impostures, only where ignorance, barbarism, and stupidity prevail'd: as it is unquestionable, that our apostle traversed great part, not only of Asia Minor, but of Macedonia, and Achaia; fixed his residence eighteen months at Corinth, a city not less celebrated for the polite arts, than for its populousness and riches; preached publicly at Athens, before the Stoics and the Epicureans, and even before the Areopagus, the most venerable judicature in Greece; not afraid of what the philosophers of that renowned mart of learning, might spread through the whole Roman empire, concerning him and his doctrine; nay,



may, and lastly preached at Rome itself, the mistress and metropolis of the world.

The reader will observe, that, in this comparison, I have shunned every thing that is of a private, and therefore of a dubious nature. The whole is founded on such actions and events as were notorious; which 'tis not in the power of cotemporary historians to falsify; such with regard to Alexander, as a *votary* could not have dissembled; such with regard to Paul, as an *enemy* durst not have denied. We are truly indebted to the essayist, who intending to exhibit a *rival* to the apostle, hath provided him with a *foil*. Truth never shines with greater lustre, than when confronted with falsehood. The evidence of our religion, how strong soever, appears not so irresistible, consider'd by itself, as when by comparison we perceive, that none of those artifices and circumstances attended its propagation, which the whole  
course

course of experience shows to be necessary to render imposture successful.

THE next topic on which the ingenious author hath bestow'd some flourishes, is the miracle "which Tacitus reports of Vespasian, who cured a blind man in Alexandria, by means of his spittle, and a lame man by the mere touch of his foot, in obedience to a vision of the god Serapis, who had enjoin'd them to have recourse to the emperor, for these miraculous and extraordinary cures." The story he introduces with, informing us, that it is "one of the best attested miracles in all profane history." If so, it will the better serve for a sample of what may be expected from that quarter. "Every circumstance," he tells us, "seems to add weight to the testimony, and might be displayed at large, with all the force

“ of argument and eloquence, if any one  
 “ were now concern’d to enforce the evi-  
 “ dence of that exploded and idolatrous  
 “ superstition.” For my part, were I con-  
 cern’d to enforce the evidence of that ex-  
 ploded and idolatrous superstition, I should  
 not wish the story were in better hands  
 than in the author’s. He is by no means  
 deficient in eloquence ; and if sometimes  
 there appear a deficiency in argument,  
 that is not imputable to him, but to the  
 subject, which cannot furnish him with a-  
 ny better: and tho’ I do not suspect him  
 to be in the least concern’d to re-establish  
 Paganism, yet ’tis well known, that hatred  
 to an adversary may as strongly animate  
 an advocate to exert himself, as affection  
 to a client.

But to proceed to the story: First, the  
 author pleads “ the gravity, solidity, age,  
 “ and probity of so great an emperor,  
 “ who, thro’ the whole course of his life,

C c

“ convers’d



“ convers’d in a familiar way with his  
 “ friends and courtiers, and never affect-  
 “ ed those extraordinary airs of divinity  
 “ assum’d by Alexander and Demetrius.”

To this character, the justness of which I intend not to controvert, I shall beg leave to add, what is equally indubitable, and much to the purpose, that no emperor shew’d a stronger inclination to corroborate his title by the sanction of the gods, than the prince of whom he is speaking. This, doubtless, he thought the more necessary in his case, as he was of an obscure family, and no way related to any of his predecessors in the empire. How fond he was of pleading *visions*, and *presages*, and *auguries*, in his favour, all the world knows \*.

The author adds, “ The historian, a  
 “ contemporary writer, noted for candour

\* Auctoritas, et quasi majestas quædam, ut scilicet inopinato et adhuc novo principi decrat, hæc quoque accessit. SÆTON.

“ and

“ and veracity, and withal the greatest  
 “ and most penetrating genius perhaps of  
 “ all antiquity, and so free from any ten-  
 “ dency to superstition and credulity, that  
 “ he even lies under the contrary imputa-  
 “ tion of atheism and profaneness.” This  
 would say a great deal, if the character of  
 the historian were of any moment in the  
 question. Doth Tacitus pretend that he  
 was himself a witness of the miracle? No.  
 Doth he mention it as a thing which he  
 believes? No. In either case I acknow-  
 ledge, that the reputation of the *relater* for  
 candour and penetration, must have add-  
 ed weight to the relation, whether confi-  
 der’d as his *testimony*, or barely as his *opi-*  
*nion*. But is it fair to plead the veracity  
 of the writer in proof of every popular ru-  
 mour mention’d by him? His veracity is  
 only concern’d to satisfy us, that it was  
 actually reported, as he relates; or that  
 the attempt was made, and the miracle  
 pretended;

pretended; a point which, I presume, nobody would have disputed, altho' the authority had been less than that of Tacitus. Indeed the historian doth not say directly, whether he believes the miracle or not; but by his manner of telling it, he plainly insinuates, that he thought it ridiculous. In introducing it, he intimates the utility of such reports to the Emperor's cause. "By which," says he, "the favour of Heaven, and the appointment of the gods, might be urg'd in support of his title\*." When he names the god *Serapis*, as warning the blind man to recur to Vespasian, he adds, in evident contempt and derision of his godship, "Who is ador'd above all others by the *Egyptians*, "a people immers'd in superstition †." Again he speaks of the Emperor, as indu-

\* Quis coelestis favor, et quædam in Vespasianum inclinatio numinum ostenderetur.

† Quem dedita superstitionibus gens ante alios colit.



ced to hope for success, by the persuasive tongues of his flatterers \*. A serious believer of the miracle would hardly have used such a style in relating it. But to what purpose did he then relate it? The answer is easy. Nothing could be more characteristic of the *Emperor*, or could better show the arts he had recourse to, and the hold which flattery had of him; nothing could be more characteristic of the *Alexandrians*, the people amongst whom the miracle is said to have been wrought.

“The persons,” says the essayist, “from  
 “whose testimony he related the miracle,  
 “of established character for judgment  
 “and veracity, *as we may well suppose*;  
 “eye-witnesses of the fact, and confirm-  
 “ing their verdict, after the Flavian fa-  
 “mily were despoil’d of the empire, and  
 “could no longer give any reward as the  
 “price of a lie.” Persons of *established*

\* Vocibus adulantium in spem induci.

*character*

*character for judgment and veracity!* Who told Mr Hume so? 'Twas not Tacitus. He only denominates them in general\*: "They who were present," and "a croud of bystanders." The author, conscious that he advances this without even the shadow of authority, hath subjoined, in order to palliate the matter, *as we may well suppose*. An admirable expedient for supplying a weak plea, with those convenient circumstances that can give it weight! When fact fails, which is not seldom the case, we need but apply to supposition, whose help is always near. But if this be allowed to take the place of argument, I see no reason why I may not avail myself of the privilege of supposing, as well as the author. The witnesses then, I will suppose, were mostly an ignorant rabble: but I wrong my cause; I have a better foundation than supposal, having

\* Qui interfuere. — Quæ astabat multitudo.

Tacitus

Tacitus himself, and all antiquity on my side, when I add, grossly addicted to *superstition*, particularly attach'd to the worship of *Serapis*, and keenly engaged in support of *Vespasian*, ALEXANDRIA having been the first city of note that publicly declared for him. Was it then matter of surprise, that a story, which at once sooth'd the superstition of the populace, and favour'd their political schemes, should gain ground among them? Can we justly wonder, that the wiser few, who were not deceiv'd, should connive at, or even contribute to promote a deceit, which was highly useful to the cause wherein themselves were embarked, and at the same time highly grateful to the many? Lastly, can we be surpris'd that any, who, for seven and twenty years, had, from motives of interest, and ambition, and popularity, propagated a falsehood, should



should not afterward be willing to expose themselves as liars?

The author finishes the story thus: "To  
 " which if we add the public nature of  
 " the facts related, it will appear, that no  
 " evidence can well be suppos'd stronger  
 " for so gross and so palpable a false-  
 " hood." As to the nature of the facts,  
 we are told by Tacitus, that when Vespasian consulted the physicians, whether such maladies were curable by human art, they declared \*, that " in the one the power of  
 " fight was not extinct, but would return,  
 " were the obstacles removed; that in the  
 " other, the joints had suffer'd some dislo-  
 " cation, which by a salutary pressure  
 " might be redressed." From this account we are naturally led to conclude, that the disorders were not so conspicuous,

\* Huic non exesam vim luminis, et reditum, si pellerentur obstantia: illi elapsos in pravum artus, si salubris vis adhibeatur, posse integrari.

but

but that either they might have been feigned, where they were not; or that cures might have been pretended, where none were perform'd. I think it is even a further presumption of the truth of this conclusion, that Suetonius, the only other Roman historian who mentions the miracle, (I know not how he hath been overlook'd by Mr Hume) differs from Tacitus, in the account he gives of the lameness. The one represents it as being in the hand, the other, as in the leg \*.

There are other circumstances regarding this story, on which I might make some remarks; but shall forbear, lest by entering into a minute discussion of particulars, that appear but trivial, when consider'd severally, I should tire both the reader and myself. I shall therefore only subjoin these simple questions. *First*, What emperor or other potentate was flattered in

\* *Manum eger. TACITUS. Debili crure. SUETONIUS.*

D d

his

his dignity and pretensions by the miracles of our Lord? What eminent personage found himself interested to support, by his authority and influence, the credit of these miracles? *Again*, What popular superstition or general and rooted prejudices were they calculated to confirm? These two circumstances, were there no other, make all the odds in the world betwixt the miracles of VESPASIAN and those of JESUS CHRIST.

So much for the PAGAN miracles mentioned by the author.

## SECTION V.

*Examination of the POPISH miracles mentioned by Mr Hume.*

THE author soon descends from ancient to modern times, and leaving *Paganism*,



nism, recurs to *Popery*, a much more fruitful source of lying wonders.

THE first of this kind he takes notice of \*, is a Spanish miracle recorded in the memoirs of Cardinal *de Retz*. The story, he says, is very memorable, and may well deserve our consideration. “ When that  
 “ intriguing politician fled into Spain, to  
 “ avoid the persecution of his enemies, he  
 “ pass’d thro’ Saragossa, the capital of Ar-  
 “ ragon; where he was shown in the ca-  
 “ thedral church, a man, who had serv’d  
 “ twenty years as a door-keeper of the  
 “ church, and was well known to every  
 “ body in town, that had ever paid their  
 “ devotions at that cathedral. He had  
 “ been for so long a time wanting a leg;  
 “ but recover’d that limb, by the rubbing  
 “ of holy oil upon the stump; and, when  
 “ the cardinal examin’d it, he found it to be

\* p. 193. &c.

"*a true natural leg, like the other.*" Would not any person imagine, from the last words of the sentence, that the cardinal had order'd the man to put off his shoes and stockings, that, by touch as well as by sight, he might be satisfied, there was no artifice us'd, but that both his legs consisted of genuine flesh and bone? Yet the truth is, his Eminency did not think it worth while to examine any one circumstance of this wonderful narration, but contented himself with reporting it precisely as it had been told him. His words literally translated are, "In that church they showed me a man, whose business it was to light the lamps, of which they have a prodigious number, telling me, that he had been seen seven years at the gate, with one leg only. I saw him there with two \*." Not one word of trial

\* L'on m'y montra un homme, qui servoit à allumer les lampes,

trial or examination, or even so much as a single question asked on the subject; not a syllable of his finding the leg to be either true or false, natural or artificial, like the other or unlike. I have a better opinion both of the candour and of the good sense of Mr Hume, than to imagine, he would have design'dly misrepresented this story, in order to render it fitter for his purpose. I believe the source of this error hath been solely the trusting to his memory in the relation which he gave, and not taking the trouble to consult the passage in the memoirs. This conjecture appears the more probable, as he hath made some other alterations, which are no way conducive to his design; such as, that the man had been seen in the church *twenty* years wanting a leg, and that he was a

lampes, qui y sont en nombre prodigieux; et l'on me dit, qu'on l'y avoit vu sept ans a la porte de cette eglise, avec une seule jambe. Je l'y vis avec deux. *Liv. 4. l'an 1654.*

*door-keeper;*



*door-keeper*; whereas the memoir-writer says only *seven* years, and that he was one *who lighted the lamps* \*.

“ This miracle was vouch’d,” says the author, “ by all the canons of the church; “ and the whole company in town were “ appeal’d to, for a confirmation of the “ fact, whom the Cardinal found, by their “ zealous devotion, to be thorough believers of the miracle.” ’Tis true, that the company in town were appeal’d to, by those ecclesiastics; but ’tis also true, that *De Retz*, by his own account, seems not to have asked any man a question on the subject. He acknowledges indeed, that an

\* Since finishing this tract, I have seen an edition of Mr Hume’s essays, &c. later than that here referr’d to. It is printed at London 1760. I must do the author the justice to observe, that, in this edition, he hath corrected the mistake, as to the cardinal’s examining the man’s leg, of which he only says, “ The cardinal assures us, that he saw him with two “ legs.” He still calls him a *door-keeper*, and says, that he had served *twenty* years in this capacity.

anniversary

anniversary festival, instituted in commemoration of the miracle, was celebrated by a vast concourse of people of all ranks.

“Here,” continues the essayist, “the relater was also contemporary to the suppos’d prodigy, of an incredulous and libertine character, as well as of great genius.” But of what weight, in this affair, is either the genius or the incredulity of the relater, since, by Mr Hume’s confession, he had no faith in the relation? Strange indeed is the use which the essayist makes of this circumstance. “What *adds mightily*,” says he, “to the force of the evidence, and may double our surprise on this occasion, is, that the cardinal himself, who relates the story, seems not to give any credit to it.” It doth not in the least surprise me, that the cardinal gives no credit to this relation; but I am beyond measure surpris’d, that Mr Hume should represent this circumstance as *adding*

*ing mightily* to the force of the evidence. Is then a story which is reported by a man of genius, the more credible that he doth not believe it? Or, Is it the more incredible that he doth believe it? What would the author have said, if the cardinal had told us, that he gave credit to the relation? Might he not, in that case, have very pertinently pleaded the great genius, and penetration, and incredulity of the relater, as *adding mightily* to the force of the evidence? On that hypothesis, he surely might, for pretty obvious reasons. Uncommon penetration qualifies a man for detecting fraud; and it requires evidence greater than ordinary to surmount incredulity. The belief therefore of such a person as the cardinal, who had not only the means of discovering an imposture, as he was cotemporary and on the spot, but the ability to discover it, as he was a man of genius, and not over-credulous; his belief,



lief, I say, would evidently have been no  
 small presumption of the truth of the mi-  
 racle. How his disbelief can be in like  
 manner a presumption of its truth, is to  
 me incomprehensible. Ay but, rejoins  
 the author, "as he seems not to give any  
 "credit to it, he cannot be suspected of  
 "any concurrence in the holy fraud."  
 Very well. I am satisfied that a man's  
 TESTIMONY is *the more* to be regarded,  
 that he is above being suspected of concur-  
 ring in *any fraud*, call it holy or unholy.  
 But I want to know why, on the very  
 same account, his OPINION is *the less* to  
 be regarded. For my part, I find no dif-  
 ficulty in believing every article of the  
 narration for which the cardinal gives his  
 testimony: notwithstanding this, I may  
 be of the same opinion with him; that  
 the account given by the dean and canons,  
 which is their testimony, not his, was all  
 a fiction. But it is not with the cardinal's

E e

testimony

*testimony* we are here concern'd: about that there is no dispute. It is with *his opinion*. Are then a man's sentiments about a matter of fact, I must insist on it, the less worthy of regard, either because he is a man of genius, and not at all credulous, or because he cannot be suspected of any concurrence in a holy fraud? Are they the more improbable on these accounts? The essayist, when he reflects, will be the last man in the world, that will assist in establishing a maxim so unfavourable, not only to candour, but even to genius and scepticism: and indeed there are few, if any, that would be greater sufferers by it than himself.

But leaving this, as one of the unfathomable depths of the essay, I proceed to the other circumstances. "The miracle," says the author, "of so singular a nature, as could scarce admit of a counterfeit." He did well at least to  
use

use the word *scarce*; for if every visitant was as little desirous of prying into the secret, as the cardinal, nothing could be more easily counterfeited: "And the witnesses very numerous, and all of them, in a manner, spectators of the fact, to which they gave their testimony." By the *very numerous witnesses*, I suppose he means the whole company in town, who were appeal'd to. They were all, in a manner, spectators of the fact. What precise abatement the author intended we should make, from the sense of the word *spectators*, on account of the qualifying phrase *in a manner*, I shall not presume to determine; but shall observe, from the memoirs, that it was not so much as pretended by the canons, that any of the citizens had seen the miracle perform'd; 'twas only pretended, that they had seen the man formerly at the gate of the church, wanting a leg. Nor is it alledged, that



any of them was at more pains in examining the matter, either before or after the recovery of the leg, than the cardinal was. They were therefore properly no spectators of the fact. The phrase *in a manner*, ought, I imagine, to have been placed in the end of the sentence, which would have run thus: “to which they, *in a manner*, gave “their testimony:” for no direct testimony was either asked of them, or given by them; their belief is *inferred* from their devotion.

I have been the more particular in my remarks on the circumstances of this story, not because there was need of these remarks; for, tho’ to the essayist the relation appear’d very *memorable*, to me, and, I believe, to most people, it appears very *trifling*; but that the reader might have this further specimen of the author’s talents in *embellishing*. To the above-mentioned, and all other such idle tales, this short and  
simple

simple answer will, by every man of sense, be thought sufficient. *The country where the miracle is said to have been wrought, is SPAIN; the people who propagated the faith of it, were THE CLERGY.* What comparison, in point of credibility, can be made between miracles, which, with no visible support but their own evidence, had at once to encounter, and did in fact overcome the abhorrence of the priest, and the tyranny of the magistrate, the insolence of the learned, and the bigotry of the superstitious: what comparison, I say, can be made between such, and any prodigies said to have been perform'd in a country, where all the powers of the nation, secular and ecclesiastical, the literature of the schools, such as it is, and the prejudices of the people, conspire in establishing their credit; a country sunk in the most obdurate superstition that ever disgraced human nature

nature \*, a country where the awe of the inquisition is so great, that no person, whatever be his sentiments, dares mutter

\* This perhaps will appear to some to be too severe a censure on a country called Christian, and may be thought to reflect on Christianity itself. I do not think it fairly capable of such a construction. That the corruption of the best things produces the worst, hath grown into a proverb; and, on the most impartial inquiry, I do not imagine it will be found, that any species of idolatry ever tended so directly to extirpate humanity, gratitude, natural affection, equity, mutual confidence, good faith, and every amiable and generous principle from the human breast, as that gross perversion of the Christian religion which is establish'd in Spain. It might easily be shown, that the human sacrifices offer'd by Heathens, had not half the tendency to corrupt the heart, and consequently deserve not to be view'd with half the horror, as those celebrated among the Spaniards, with so much pomp, and barbarous festivity, at an *auto da fe*. It will not surely be affirm'd, that our Saviour reflected on the Mosaic institution, or genuine Judaism, when he said, *Wo unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, YE MAKE him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.* Yet the words plainly imply, that even *Pagans*, by being converted to the *Judaism* that was then professed, were *made* children of hell, and consequently corrupted, instead of being re-form'd. See Matth. xxiii. 15.



a syllable against any opinion that hath obtain'd the patronage of their spiritual guides? But that I may not be accus'd of prepossession, or suspected of exaggerating, I shall only give the sentiments of two eminent foreigners (who were not Protestants, and may therefore be suppos'd the more impartial) concerning that nation, and the influence which the holy tribunal has both on their character and manners. Voltaire \*, speaking of the inquisition as establish'd in Spain, says, " Their form of proceeding is an infal-  
 " lible way to destroy whomsoever the in-  
 " quisitors please. The prisoners are not  
 " confronted with the informers; and  
 " there is no informer who is not listen'd  
 " to. A public criminal, an infamous  
 " person, a child, a prostitute, are credit-  
 " able accusers. Even the son may de-  
 " pose against his father; the wife against

\* Essai sur l'histoire générale, chap. 118.

" her

" her husband. In fine, the prisoner is  
 " compell'd to inform against himself, to  
 " divine, and to confess, the crime laid  
 " to his charge; of which often he is ig-  
 " norant. This procedure, unheard of till  
 " the institution of this court, makes the  
 " whole kingdom tremble. Suspicion  
 " reigns in every breast. Friendship and  
 " openness are at an end. The brother  
 " dreads his brother, the father his son.  
 " Hence taciturnity is become the charac-  
 " teristic of a nation endued with all the  
 " vivacity natural to the inhabitants of a  
 " warm and fruitful climate. To this tri-  
 " bunal we must likewise impute that pro-  
 " found ignorance of sound philosophy, in  
 " which Spain lies buried, whilst Germa-  
 " ny, England, France, and even Italy,  
 " have discover'd so many truths, and en-  
 " larged the sphere of our knowledge. Ne-  
 " ver is human nature so debas'd, as when  
 " ignorance is armed with power." " 'Tis  
 " necessary,"

“ necessary,” says Montesquieu \*, in the humble remonstrance to the inquisitors of Spain and Portugal, “ that we advertise  
 “ you of one thing ; ’tis, that if any per-  
 “ son, in future times, shall dare assert,  
 “ that, in the age wherein we live, the  
 “ Europeans were civilized, you will be  
 “ quoted to prove that they were barba-  
 “ rians, and the idea people will form of  
 “ you, will be such as will dishonour  
 “ your age, and bring hatred on all your  
 “ cotemporaries.”

I COME now to consider the miracles said to have been perform’d in the church-yard of Saint Medard, at the tomb of *Abbé* Paris. On these the author hath expatiated with great parade, exulting, that he hath found in them, as he imagines, what, in respect of number, and nature, and evidence, may outvie the miracles of

\* De l’esprit des loix, liv. 25. chap. 13.



holy writ. Yet should we admit them to be true, how they can be consider'd as proofs of any doctrine, or how they can affect the evidence of the miracles recorded in scripture, 'twill not perhaps be easy to discover. But setting that question aside, I propose to examine their evidence; and that, not by entering into a particular inquiry concerning each separate fact mention'd in Montgeron's collection, as such an inquiry would appear, to every judicious reader, both tedious and impertinent; but by making a few general observations, founded in unquestionable fact, and mostly supported even by the authority of Montgeron, that doughty champion of the Jansenist faint \*.

\* The character of his book is very justly and very briefly expressed in *Le siecle de Louis XIV.* in these words: " Si ce  
" livre subsistait un jour, et que les autres fussent perdus, la po-  
" sterité croirait que notre siecle a été un tems de barbarie,"  
*chap. 33.*

*First*, Let it be remarked, that it was often objected by the enemies of the saint, and scarce contradicted, never confuted, by his friends, that the prostrations at his sepulchre *produced* more diseases, than they *cur'd*. The ingenious author lately quoted, in the account he gives of the affairs of the church in the ninth century, taking occasion incidentally to mention the miracles of the *Abbé*, speaks of this circumstance, as a thing universally known, and undeniable\*. “I should not take notice,” says he, “of an epidemical folly with which the people of Dijon were seized in 844, occasion’d by one Saint Benignus, who threw those into convulsions who prayed on his tomb; I should not, I say, mention this popular superstition, had it not been furiously reviv’d in our days, in parallel circumstances. It seems, as if the same follies were de-

\* *Essai sur l’histoire générale, chap. 21.*

“fin’d to make their appearance, from  
 “time to time, on the theatre of the  
 “world: but good sense is also the same  
 “at all times; and nothing so judicious  
 “hath been said, concerning the modern  
 “miracles wrought on the tomb of I know  
 “not what deacon at Paris, as what a  
 “bishop of Lyons said, concerning those  
 “of Dijon. *A strange saint indeed, that*  
 “*maims those who pay their devoirs to him.*  
 “*I should think, miracles ought to be per-*  
 “*form’d for the curing, and not for the in-*  
 “*flicting of maladies.”*

The second observation is, That the in-  
 stances of persons cur’d are extremely few,  
 compar’d with the multitudes of people  
 in distress, who night and day attended  
 the sepulchre, imploring in vain the in-  
 tercession of the saint. The crouds of sick  
 and infirm, who flocked to the tomb for  
 relief, were, by all accounts, innumerable:  
 whereas all the cures which the zealous  
 and



and indefatigable Montgeron could procure vouchers of, amounted only to NINE. The author therefore must be understood, as speaking with great latitude, when he says, "There surely never was so great  
 " a number of miracles ascrib'd to one  
 " person, as those which were lately said  
 " to have been wrought in France, upon  
 " the tomb of *Abbé Paris*, the famous Jan-  
 " senist, with whose sanctity the people  
 " were so long deluded \*." If *thousands* of diseased persons had applied for medicine to some ignorant quack, in the assurance of his extraordinary abilities; would it be matter of surprise to a reasonable man, that, of so many, *eight or nine* should be found, whose distempers had taken a favourable turn, whilst they were using his specifics, and had thereby given countenance to the delusion? I think it

\* p. 195.

would

would be matter of surprise that there were so few.

I shall observe, *thirdly*, That *imposture* was actually detected, and proved in several instances. That the reader may be satisfied of this, I must intreat him to have recourse to the Archbishop of Sens' *Pastoral instruction*; a book which Mr Hume could not, with propriety, take any notice of, having positively asserted, that "the enemies to those opinions, in whose favour the miracles were said to have been wrought, were never able distinctly to refute or detect them \*." This prelate, on the contrary, hath not only given a distinct refutation of some of those pretended miracles, but hath clearly expos'd the deceit and little artifices by which their credit was supported. I intend not to descend to particulars, and shall therefore only refer the reader to the book itself,

\* p. 195.

and

and beg that he will peruse what relates to the cases of *Jacques Laurent Menedrieux*, *Jean Nivet*, *Sieur le Doulx*, *Laleu*, *Anne Coulon*, the widow *de Lorme*, as well as *Mademoiselle le Franc*, of whom the essayist hath taken some notice in a note. In this perusal, the reader will observe the shameful prevarications of some Jansenist witnesses, for whom Mr Hume would fain apologize, by telling us pleasantly, they were *tamper'd with* \*. I shall only add on this head, that the detection of fraud in some instances, justly brings suspicion on all the other instances. A man whom I know to have lied to me, on several occasions, I shall suspect, on every occasion, where I have not access to discover, whether what he affirms be true or false: 'Tis in the same way we judge of the spirit and conduct of parties, as of individuals.

\* p. 197. in the note.



I observe, *fourthly*, That all the cures recorded by Montgeron, as duly attested, were such as might have been effected by *natural* means. There are two kinds of miracles, to which Mr Hume hath alluded in a note, tho' he does not directly make the distinction. One is, when the event, consider'd by itself, is evidently *preternatural*. Of this kind are, raising the dead, walking on water, making whole the maimed; for by no natural causes can these effects be produced. The other kind is, when the event, consider'd by itself, is *natural*, that is, may be produced by natural causes, but is denominated miraculous, on account of the manner. That a sick person should be restor'd to health, is not, when consider'd singly, preternatural; but that health should be restor'd by the command of a man, undoubtedly is. Let us hear the author on this point: " Sometimes an event may  
" not

“ not, *in itself*, seem to be contrary to the  
 “ laws of nature, and yet, if it were real,  
 “ it might, by reason of some circumstan-  
 “ ces, be denominated a miracle; because,  
 “ *in fact*, it is contrary to these laws.  
 “ Thus, if a person claiming a divine au-  
 “ thority, should command a sick person  
 “ to be well, a healthful man to fall down  
 “ dead, the clouds to pour rain, the  
 “ winds to blow, in short, should order  
 “ many natural events, which immediate-  
 “ ly follow upon his command; these  
 “ might justly be esteemed miracles, be-  
 “ cause they are really, in this case, con-  
 “ trary to the laws of nature. For if a-  
 “ ny suspicion remain, that the event and  
 “ command concurr’d by accident, there  
 “ is no miracle, and no transgression of  
 “ the laws of nature. If this suspicion be  
 “ remov’d, there is evidently a miracle,  
 “ and a transgression of these laws; be-  
 “ cause nothing can be more contrary to

G g

“ nature,

“ nature, than that the voice or command  
 “ of a man, should have such an influ-  
 “ ence \*.” From what hath been said, it  
 appears, that these two kinds of miracles  
 must differ considerably in respect of evi-  
 dence, since the latter naturally gives room  
 for a suspicion, which is absolutely exclu-  
 ded from the former. In the former,  
 when the fact or event is prov’d, the mi-  
 racle is unquestionable. In the latter, the  
 fact may be prov’d, and yet the miracle  
 may be justly question’d. It therefore me-  
 rits our attention, that all the miracles  
 recorded in Montgeron’s collection, that  
 is, all for which any rational evidence is  
 pretended, were of the second kind. One  
 of the most considerable of those cures,  
 was that of the Spanish gentleman, who  
 had lost one eye, and was distressed with  
 an inflammation in the other. The in-  
 flamed eye was cured, but the lost eye was

\* p. 181. in the note.



not restored. Had there been a reproduction of the member which had perished, a sufficient proof of the fact, would have been a sufficient proof of the miracle. But as the case was otherwise, the fact vouch'd may be admitted, without admitting any miracle. The cures said to have been perform'd on those patients who were afflicted with paralytic or dropfical disorders, or that perform'd on Louisa Coirin, who had a tumor on her breast, will not appear to be intitled to a rank in the first class. As little can the cure of Peter Gautier claim that honour. One of his eyes had been prick'd with an awl; in consequence of which the aqueous humour dropped out, and he became blind of that eye. His sight was restor'd, whilst he paid his addresses to the *Abbé*. But that a puncture in the cornea of the eye will often heal of itself, and that the aqueous humour, after it hath been quite lost, will

be recruited, and consequently, that the faculty of vision will, in such a case, be recover'd, is what every oculist can assure us of. The loss of the watery humour, is the constant effect of a very common operation in surgery, couching the cataract. Hence we may learn, how we ought to understand these words of the author, "The curing of the sick, giving hearing to the deaf, and sight to the blind, were every where talked of, as the usual effects of that holy sepulchre \*." As therefore the alledged miracles were all of the second class, 'tis only from the attendant circumstances we can judge, whether the facts, tho' acknowledged, were miraculous or not.

In order to enlighten us on this point, I observe, *fifthly*, That *none* of the cures were *instantaneous*. We have not indeed the same hold of the deceased *Abbé*, as of

\* p. 195.

a living prophet, who pretends to work miracles. Those who attend the latter, can know exactly, to whom he grants the benefit of his miraculous aid. They can judge also, whether the supplicant's recovery be coincident, in respect of time, with the prophet's volition or command. In the former case, we have not access to judge of either; and consequently, there is much greater scope for fancy and credulity to operate. No voice was ever said to have proceeded from the tomb of the blessed deacon, as his votaries styled him. They obtained no audible answer to their prayers. There are however some circumstances, by which a probable conjecture may be made concerning the efficiency of the saint in the cures ascrib'd to him. One is, if the cure instantaneously follow'd the first devotions at the tomb. Supernatural cures differ, in this particular, as much as in any other, from those which are effected



fectcd by natural means, that they are not *gradually*, but *instantly*, perfected. Now of which kind were the cures of Saint Medard? From the accounts that are given, 'tis evident, that they were *gradual*. That some of them were *sudden*, is alledged; but that any of them were *instantaneous*, or immediately follow'd the first application, is not even pretended. All the worshippers at the tomb, persisted for *days*, several of them for *weeks*, and some for *months* successively, daily imploring the intercession of the *Abbé*, before they receiv'd relief from their complaints; and the relief which was receiv'd, is, in most cases, acknowledged to have been gradual.

I observe, *sixthly*, That most of the devotees either had been using *medicines* before, and continued to use them, during their applications to the saint; or, that their distempers had *abated*, before they determin'd to solicit his help. That the

Spanish

Spanish

Spanish youth had been using, all the while, a medicine prescrib'd by an eminent oculist, was prov'd by the depositions of witnesses ; that Gautier had begun to recover his sight, before he had recourse to the sepulchre, was attested, not only by his uncle, but even by himself, when, as the Archbishop of Sens informs us, he sign'd a recantation of what he had formerly advanced. With regard to the rest, it appears at least probable, from the circumstances of the proof, that they were using the prescriptions of the physicians, whom they had consulted before applying to the deacon, and who were afterward requir'd to give their testimony, concerning the nature and malignancy of the different diseases.

The *seventh* observation is, That some of the cures attested were *incomplete*. This was manifestly the case of the Spaniard, who was reliev'd only from the most in-  
considerable

considerable part of his complaint. Even the cure of *Mademoiselle Thibault*, which was as great a subject of exultation to the partisans of the *Abbé* as any other, was not complete. Not only was she confin'd to her bed, for many days, after the decrease of her dropsy; but she still remain'd incapable of moving two of her fingers. Silva, physician to the Duke of Orleans, attested this; adding expressly, that he *could not look on her as being cur'd.*

The *eighth* and last observation I shall make on this subject is, That the relief granted some of them was but *temporary*. This was clearly prov'd to be the case of the Spaniard. That soon after his return home, he relaps'd into his former malady, the prelate I have often quoted, hath, by the certificates and letters which he procur'd from Madrid, put beyond controversy. Among these, there are letters from a Spanish grandee, Don Francis Xavier,



vier, and from the patient's uncle, besides a certificate signed by himself.

After the above observations, I believe, there will be no occasion for saying much on this subject. The author has, in a note, artfully enough pointed out his aim, that it might not be overlook'd by the careless reader \*. " There is another " book," says he, " in three volumes, " (called, *Recueil des miracles de l'Abbé Paris*) giving an account of many of these " miracles, and accompanied with prefatory discourses, which are very well " wrote." He adds, " There runs, however, thro' the whole of these, a ridiculous comparifon betwixt the miracles " of our Saviour and those of the *Abbé*; " wherein 'tis asserted, that the evidence " for the latter is equal to that for the " former." At first reading, one is apt, with surprise, to imagine, that the author

\* p. 196.

is going to make some atonement for the tenets of the essay, by turning advocate for the miracles of Jesus Christ; and by showing, that these are not affected by his doctrine. But on this point we are not long held in suspense. He subjoins, "As  
" if the testimony of men could ever be  
" put in the balance with that of God  
" himself, who conducted the pen of the  
" inspired writers." An ingenious piece of raillery without question. Is it possible, in a politer manner, or in more obliging terms, to tell the Christian world, *They are fools*; and that all who are silly enough to believe the miracles recorded in scripture, are not intitled to be argued with as *men*. How? They are so absurd as to believe the scriptures to be the word of God, on the evidence of the miracles wrought by our Lord and his apostles; and that these miracles were wrought, they could not believe on any testimony,  
less

less than that of God, reporting them in the scriptures; and thus, by making inspiration and miracles reciprocally foundations to each other, they, in effect, admit both without any foundation at all. After this handsome compliment to the friends of holy writ, he thinks himself at liberty to be very explicit on the comparative evidence of the miracles of the *Abbe*, and those of Jesus: "If these writers  
 "indeed were to be consider'd merely as  
 "human testimony, the French author is,  
 "*very moderate* in his comparison; since  
 "he might, *with some appearance of rea-*  
 "*son*, pretend, that the Jansenist miracles  
 "*much surpass* the other, in evidence and  
 "authority." Was ever so rough an assault preceded by so smooth, but so insidious a preamble? Is it then still the fate of Jesus to be betrayed with a kiss? But notwithstanding this author's declaration, no Christian will have reason to dread the



issue of the comparison. Mr Hume hath not enter'd on particulars, neither shall I enter on them. I should not incline to tire my reader with repetitions, which, in a minute inquiry, would be inevitable. I shall therefore only desire him, if he think it needful, to peruse a second time the eight foregoing observations. Let him try the miracles of our Lord by this touchstone; and I persuade myself, he will be satisfied, that there is *no appearance of reason* to pretend, that the Jansenist miracles *much surpass* the other, or even equal them, in evidence and authority.

The author triumphs not a little in the observation, that the reports of the prodigies perform'd by the deacon, were violently oppos'd by the civil magistrate, and by the Jesuits, the most learned society in the kingdom. He could see the importance of this circumstance in the case of *Abbé Paris*, tho' not in the case of Jesus Christ.

But

But that the difference of the cases, as well as their resemblance, may better appear; it ought likewise to be observed, that Janfenism, tho' not the *ruling* faction, was at that time the *popular* faction; that this popularity was not the effect of the miracles of the *Abbé*, but antecedent to these miracles; that, on the contrary, the Jesuits were extremely *unpopular*; and that many, who had no more faith in the miracles of Saint Medard than Mr Hume hath, were well pleas'd to connive at a delusion, which at once plagued and mortified a body of men, that were become almost universally odious.

I shall only add, that nothing could more effectually expose the folly of those pretensions, than the expedient by which they were made to cease. In consequence of an order from the King, the sepulchre was inclosed with a wall, and the votaries were debarr'd from approaching the tomb.

The

The author says in relation to this \*, "No  
 "Janfenist was ever embarrass'd to ac-  
 "count for the cessation of the miracles,  
 "when the churchyard was shut up by  
 "the King's edict." Certain it is, that  
 "God is master of his own graces and  
 "works." But it is equally certain, that  
 neither reason nor the gospel leads us to  
 think, that any human expedient will  
 prove successful, which is calculated to  
 frustrate the decrees of Heaven. Both, on  
 the contrary, teach us, that men never  
 more directly *promote* the designs of their  
 maker, than when they intend directly to  
*oppose* them. It was not thus, that either  
 Pharisees or Sadducees, Jews or Gentiles,  
 succeeded in their opposition to the miracles  
 of Jesus and his apostles. The opinion of  
 Gamaliel † was undoubtedly judicious:  
*If this counsel or this work be of men, it will*  
*come to nought; but if it be of God, ye CAN-*

\* p. 198. in the note. † Acts v. 38. 39.



NOT overthrow it; beware therefore, lest ye be found fighting even against God. To conclude, Did the Jansenist cause derive any advantage from those pretended miracles? None at all. It even suffer'd by them. It is justly remarked by Voltaire \*, that "the tomb of the deacon Paris, prov'd in effect, in the minds of all people of sense, the tomb of Jansenism." How unlike in all respects the miracles recorded by the Evangelists!

THUS I have briefly inquir'd into the nature and evidence, first of the *Pagan*, and next of the *Popish* miracles, mentioned by Mr Hume; and have, I hope, sufficiently evinced, that the miracles of the New Testament can suffer nothing by the comparifon; that, on the contrary, as, in painting, the shades serve to heighten the glow of the colours; and,

\* Siècle de Louis XIV. chap. 33.

in music, the discords to set off the sweetness of the melody; so the value of these genuine miracles is enhanced by the contrast of those paltry counterfeits.

## SECTION VI.

*Abstracting from the evidence for particular facts, we have irrefragable evidence, that there have been miracles in former times; or such events as, when compar'd with the present constitution of the world, would by Mr Hume be denominated miraculous.*

**I** READILY concur with Mr Hume in maintaining, that when, merely by the force of REASON, we attempt to investigate the *origin of worlds* \*, we get beyond our sphere, and must infallibly bewilder ourselves in hypotheses and conjec-

\* Essay 12. Of the academical or sceptical philosophy.  
part 3.

ture. REASON indeed (which vainly boasts her all-sufficiency) hath sometimes pretended to carry men to this amazing height. But there is ground to suspect, that, in such instances, the ascent of *reason*, as the author elegantly expresseth it \*, hath been aided by the wings of *imagination*. If we will not be indebted to REVELATION, for our knowledge of this article, we must, for aught I can perceive, be satisfied to live in ignorance. There is, however, one question distinct from the former, tho' akin to it, which, even from the principles of reason, we may with great probability determine. The question I mean is, Whether the world had an origin or not?

That there hath been an infinite, eternal, and independent series of finite, successive, and dependent beings, such as men, and consequently that the world

\* Essay 11. Of a particular providence and future state.



had no beginning, appears, from the bare consideration of the thing, extremely incredible, if not altogether absurd. The abstract argument us'd on this head, might appear too metaphysical and refin'd: I shall not therefore introduce it; but shall recur to topics, which are more familiar, and which, tho' they do not demonstrate, that the eternity of the world is absolutely impossible, evince, that it is highly improbable, or rather, certainly false. These topics I shall only mention, as they are pretty obvious, and have been often urged with great energy by the learned, both ancient and modern. Such are, the late invention of letters, and of all the sciences and arts by which human life is civilized; the known origin of most nations, states and kingdoms; and the first peopling of many countries. 'Tis in our power at present to trace the history of every people backwards to times of the greatest

greatest barbarity and ignorance. Europe, tho' not the largest of the four parts into which the earth is divided, is, on many accounts, the most considerable. But what a different face doth Europe wear at present, from what it did three thousand years ago? How immense the odds in knowledge, in arts, in policy, in every thing? How easy is the intercourse, and how extensive the acquaintance, which men can now enjoy with all, even the remotest regions of the globe, compar'd with what was, or could have been enjoy'd, in that time of darkness and simplicity? A man differs not more from a child, than the human race now differs from what the human race was then. Three thousand years ago, appear indeed to mark a very distant epoch; and yet it is but as yesterday, compar'd with eternity. This, when duly weigh'd, every thinking person will acknowledge to be as strong moral evi-

dence, as the subject can admit, (and that I imagine is very strong) that the world had a beginning.

I shall make a supposition, which will perhaps appear whimsical, but which will tend to elucidate the argument I am enforcing. In antediluvian times, when the longevity of man was such as to include some centuries, I shall suppose, that a few boys had been transported to a desert island, and there left together, just old enough to make shift to sustain themselves, as those in the golden age are fabled to have done, on acorns, and other spontaneous productions of the soil. I shall suppose, that they had lived there for some hundreds of years, had remember'd nothing of their coming into the island, nor of any other person whatsoever; and that thus they had never had access to know, or hear, of either birth, or death. I shall suppose them to enter into a serious disquisition



quisition concerning their own duration, the question having been started, Whether they had existed from eternity, or had once begun to be? They recur to memory: but memory can furnish them with nothing certain or decisive. If it must be allowed, that it contains no trace of a beginning of existence, it must also be allow'd, that it reaches not beyond a few centuries at most. They observe besides, concerning this faculty, that the further back it goes, it becomes the more indistinct, terminating at last in confusion and darkness. Some things however they distinctly recollect, and are assured of. They remember, they were once of much lower stature, and of smaller size; they had less bodily strength; and all their mental faculties were weaker. They know, that, in the powers both of body and mind, they have advanced, by imperceptible degrees, to the pitch they are now arriv'd at.

at. These considerations, especially when fortified by some analogous observations they might have made, on the growth of herbs and trees, would have shown the probability to be entirely on the side of those who asserted, that their existence had a beginning: And tho', on account of the narrow sphere of their knowledge and experience, the argument could not have appear'd to them in all its strength, we, from our larger acquaintance with nature, even abstracting from our knowledge of man in particular, must be satisfied, that it would have been strictly analogical and just. Exactly *similar*, I should rather say, the very *same*, is the argument I have been urging for the origination of the species. Make but a few alterations in phraseology; for *memory*, substitute *history and tradition*; for *hundreds* of years, say *thousands*; for *the powers of body and mind*, put *the arts and sciences*; and, with these,

these, and perhaps one or two more such variations, you will find the argument as applicable in the one case, as in the other. Now, if it be granted, that the human species must have had a beginning, it will hardly be question'd, that every other animal species, or even that the universe, must have had a beginning.

BUT in order to prove the proposition laid down in the title of this section, 'tis not necessary to suppose, that the world had a beginning. Admit it had not, and observe the consequence. Thus much must be admitted also, that not barely for a *long continued*, but for an ETERNAL, succession of generations, mankind were in a state little superior to the beasts ; that of a sudden, there came a most astonishing change upon the species ; that they exerted talents and capacities, of which there appear'd not the smallest vestiges, during the  
eternity



eternity preceding ; that they acquir'd such knowledge as procur'd them a kind of empire, not only over the vegetable and animal worlds, but even, in some respect, over the elements, and all the unwieldy powers of matter ; that, in consequence of this, they were quickly rais'd, much more above the state they had been formerly and eternally in, than such their former and eternal state was above that of the brute creation. If such a revolution in nature, such a thorough, general, and sudden change as this, would not be denominated miraculous, 'tis not in my power to conceive what would. I could not esteem it a greater miracle, hardly so great, that any species of beasts, which have hitherto been doom'd to tread the earth, should now get wings, and float about in the air.

Nor will this plea be subverted by that trite objection, That mankind may have  
been

been as much enlighten'd, perhaps myriads of years ago, as they are at present; but that by some *universal* calamity, such as deluge or conflagration, which, after the rotation of many centuries, the earth possibly becomes liable to, all traces of erudition and of science, of both the elegant and the useful arts, may have been effaced, and the human race, springing from a few who had escap'd the common ruin, may have emerged anew, out of barbarity and ignorance. This hypothesis doth but substitute one miracle in the place of another. Such general disorder is entirely unconformable to our experience of the course of nature. Accordingly the destruction of the world by a deluge, the author hath number'd among those prodigies, or miracles, which render the Pentateuch perfectly incredible.

If, on the contrary, we admit, that the

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world

world had a beginning, (and will not every thinking person acknowledge, that this position is much more probable than the contrary?) the production of the world must be ascrib'd either to *chance*, or to *intelligence*.

Shall we derive all things, spiritual and corporeal, from a principle so insignificant as blind *chance*? Shall we say, with Epicurus, that the fortuitous concourse of rambling atoms hath rear'd this beautiful and stupendous fabric? In that case, perhaps, we should give an account of the origin of things, which, most people will think, could not properly be styl'd miraculous. But is it, because the formation of a grand and regular system in this way, is conformable to the experienced order of nature? Quite the reverse. Nothing can be more repugnant to universal experience, than that the least organic body, not to mention the glorious frame of nature,



ture, should be produced by such a casual jumble. It has therefore, in the highest degree possible, that particular quality of miracles, from which, according to the author's theory, their incredibility results, and may doubtless, in this loose acceptance of the word, be term'd *miraculous*. But should we affirm, that, to account thus for the origin of the universe, is to account for it by miracle; we should be thought, I'm afraid, to speak both weakly and improperly. There is something here, if I may so express myself, which is far beyond the miraculous; something, for which I know not whether any language can afford a proper appellation, unless it be the general appellations of *absurdity* and *nonsense*.

Shall we then at last recur to the common doctrine, that the world was produced by an *intelligent cause*? On this supposition also, tho' incomparably the most

rational, it is evident, that in the creation, formation, or first production of things, call it by what name you please, a power must have been exerted, which, in respect of the present course of nature, may be styled *miraculous*. I intend not to dispute about a word, nor to inquire, whether that term can, in strict propriety, be us'd of any exertions before the establishment of the laws of nature. I use the word in the same latitude, in which the author commonly useth it in his reasoning, for every event, that is not conformable to that course of nature with which we are acquainted by experience.

WHETHER, therefore, the world *had*, or *had not*, a *beginning*; whether, on the *first* supposition, in order to solve the numberless objections that arise, we *do*, or *do not*, recur to universal *catastrophes*; whether, on the *second*, the production of things

things be ascrib'd to *chance*, or to *design*; there is no possibility of accounting for the phenomena that presently come under our notice, without having at last recourse to MIRACLES; that is, to events altogether unconformable, or, if you will, contrary to the present course of nature known to us by experience. I cannot conceive an hypothesis, which is not reducible to one or other of those above mentioned. Whoever imagines, that another might be framed, which is not comprehended in any of those, and which hath not as yet been devis'd by any system-builder; let him make the experiment, and I will venture to prognosticate, that he will still find himself clogged with the same difficulty. The conclusion therefore above deduced, may be justly deem'd, till the contrary is shown, to be not only the result of one, but alike of every hypothesis, of which the subject is susceptible.

Thus



Thus it hath been evinced, as was propos'd, that abstracting from the evidence for particular facts, we have irrefragable evidence, that there have been, that there must have been, *miracles* in former times, or such events, as, when compar'd with the present constitution of the world, would by Mr Hume be denominated miraculous.

#### SECTION VII.

*Revisal of Mr Hume's examination of the Pentateuch.*

ALLOWING to the conclusion deduced in the foregoing section its proper weight, I shall also take into consideration the *Pentateuch*, or five books of Moses; or rather, I shall endeavour impartially to revise the examination which those books have already undergone by the  
essayist

essayist \*. It is, in this case, of the greatest importance to know, whether the evidence on both sides hath been fairly stated.

“ HERE then we are first to consider a “ book,” which is acknowledged, on all sides, to be the most ancient record in the world, “ presented to us,” we admit, “ by “ a barbarous and ignorant people †,” at the same time exhibiting a system of *Theism*, or natural religion, which is both rational and sublime; with which nothing that was ever compil’d or produced, on this subject, in the most enlighten’d ages, by the most learned, and polished nations,

\* p. 205.

† The author adds, “ wrote in an age, when they were “ still more barbarous.” These words I have omitted in the revisal, because they appear to me unintelligible. The age in which the Pentateuch was written, is indirectly compared to another age, he says not what: and all we can make of it is, that this people were more barbarous at that time, than at some other time, nobody knows when.

who

who were unacquainted with that book, will bear to be compar'd.

Mr Hume himself must allow, that this remark deserves attention, since his reasoning in another performance, which he calls, *The natural history of religion*, would lead us to expect the contrary. He there maintains, that *Polytheism* and *Idolatry* are, and must be, the religion of rude and barbarous, and consequently of ancient ages; that the true principles of *Theism*, or the belief of one almighty and wise being, the creator, the preserver, and the ruler of heaven and earth, results from the greatest improvements of the understanding in philosophy and science. To suppose the contrary, says he, is supposing, that  
 “ while men were ignorant and barbarous, they discover’d truth; but fell in-  
 “ to error, as soon as they acquir’d learn-  
 “ ing and politeness \*.” This reasoning

\* Natural history of religion. I.



is just, where-ever religion is to be consider'd as the result of human reflections. What account then will the author give of this wonderful exception? That the reverse is here the case, it is impossible for him to dissemble. The people he himself calls ignorant and barbarous; yet they are not idolaters or polytheists. At the time when the book, which he examines, was compos'd, he seems to think, they even exceeded themselves in barbarity; yet the sentiments of these barbarians, on the subject of religion, the sentiments which that very book presents to us, may well put to silence the wisdom of the politest nations on the earth. Need I remind Mr Hume of his express declaration, that if a traveller were transported into any unknown region, and found the inhabitants " ignorant and barbarous, he might beforehand declare them idolaters, and there " is *scarce* a POSSIBILITY of his being

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" mistaken

“mistaken \*?” I know no satisfactory account that can be given of this exception, on the principles of the essayist. Nevertheless, nothing is more easy, than to give a satisfactory account of it, on the Christian principles. This account is that which is given by the book itself. It is, that the religious tenets of that nation were not the result of their reasonings, but proceeded from divine revelation. The contrast we discern betwixt the sons of ISRAEL, and the ancient GREEKS and ROMANS, is remarkable. The GREEKS and ROMANS, on all the subjects of human erudition, on all the liberal and useful arts, reasoned like *men*; on the subject of religion, they prated like *children*. The sons of ISRAEL, on the contrary, in all the sciences and arts, were *children*; but, in their notions of religion, they were *men*; in the doctrines, for example, of the

\* Natural history of religion. I.

unity,

unity, the eternity, the omnipotence, the omniscience, the omnipresence, the wisdom, and the goodness of God; in their opinions concerning providence, and the creation, preservation and government of the world; opinions so exalted and comprehensive, as, even by the author's acknowledgment, could never enter into the thoughts of barbarians.

But to proceed in the revival: We have here a book, says the essayist, "wrote in all probability long after the facts it relates." That this book was written long after *some* of the facts it relates, is not indeed denied; that it was written long after *all*, or even *most* of those facts, I see no reason to believe. If Mr Hume meant to signify, by the expression quoted, that this was in all probability the case, why did he not produce the grounds on which the probability is founded? Shall a bold assertion pass for argument? or can it be



expected, that any one should consider reasons, which are only in general suppos'd, but not specified?

He adds, "corroborated by no *concurring* testimony;" as little, say I, invalidated by any *contradicting* testimony; and both, for this plain reason, because there is no human composition, that can be compar'd with this, in respect of antiquity. But tho' this book is not corroborated by the concurrent testimony of any coeval histories, because, if there ever were such histories, they are not now extant; it is not therefore destitute of all collateral evidence. The following examples of this kind of evidence deserve some notice. The division of time into weeks, which hath obtain'd in many countries, for instance among the Egyptians, Chinese, Indians, and northern Barbarians; nations whereof some had little or no intercourse with others, and were not even known

known by name to the Hebrews \*: the tradition which in several places prevail'd concerning the primitive state of innocence and happiness: the subsequent degeneracy of mankind: their destruction by a flood: and the preservation of one family in a vessel. Nay, which is still stronger, I

\* The judicious reader will observe, that there is a great difference between the concurrence of nations, in the division of time into *weeks*, and their concurrence in the other periodical divisions, into *years*, *months*, and *days*. These divisions arise from such natural causes, as are every where obvious; the annual and diurnal revolutions of the sun, and the revolution of the moon. The division into *weeks*, on the contrary, seems perfectly arbitrary; consequently its prevailing in distant countries, among nations which had no communication with one another, affords a strong presumption, that it must have been deriv'd from some tradition (as that of the creation) which hath been older than the dispersion of mankind into different regions. 'Tis easy to conceive, that the practice, in rude and barbarous ages, might remain, thro' habit, when the tradition, on which it was founded, is entirely lost; 'tis easy to conceive, that afterward, people addicted to idolatry, or who, like the Egyptians, had become proficient in astronomy, should assign to the different days of the week, the names of their deities, or of the planets.

might

might plead the vestiges of some such catastrophe as the deluge, which the shells and other marine bodies, that are daily dug out of the bowels of the earth, in places remote from the sea, do clearly exhibit to us: I might urge the traces, which still remain in ancient histories, of the migration of people and of science from Asia (which hath not improperly been styled *the cradle of the arts*) into many parts both of Africa and Europe: I might plead the coincidence of those migrations, and of the origin of states and kingdoms, with the time of the dispersion of the posterity of Noah.

But to return: The author subjoins, “resembling those fabulous accounts, which every nation gives of its origin.” ’Tis unluckily the fate of holy writ with this author, that both its resemblance, and its want of resemblance, to the accounts of other authors, are alike presumptions against



gainst it. He hath not indeed told us, wherein it resembles fabulous accounts; and, for my part, tho' the charge were perfectly just, I should imagine, little or nothing to the disadvantage of the Pentateuch, could be deduced from it. It is universally agreed among the learned, that even the most absurd fables of idolaters, derive their origin from facts, which having been, in barbarous ages, transmitted only by oral tradition, have come at length to be grossly corrupted and disfigur'd. 'Tis nevertheless probable, that such fictions would still retain some striking features of those truths, from which they sprung. And if the books of Moses resemble, in any thing, the fabulous accounts of other nations, it would not perhaps be difficult to prove, that they resemble only whatever is least fabulous in these accounts. That this will be found to be the case, we may reasonably presume,

fume, even from what hath been observ'd already; and if so, the resemblance, so far from being an argument against those books, is evidently an argument in their favour. In order to remove any doubt that may remain on this head, it ought to be attended to, that, in a number of concurrent testimonies, (where there could have been no previous concert) there is a probability independent of that which results from our faith in the witnesses; nay, should the witnesses be of such a character as to merit no faith at all. This probability ariseth from the *concurrence* itself. That such a concurrence should spring from *chance*, is as one to infinite, in other words, morally impossible; if therefore concert be excluded, there remains no other cause but the reality of the fact.

"Tis true, that " upon reading this book,  
" we find it full of prodigies and mi-  
" racles:"

“racles:” but ’tis also true, that many of those miracles are such, as the subject it treats of, must unavoidably make us expect. For a proof of this position, I need but refer the reader to the principles establish’d in the preceding section. No book in the world do we find written in a more simple style; nowhere does there appear in it, the least affectation of ornament; yet nowhere else is the Almighty represented, as either acting or speaking in a manner so becoming the eternal ruler of the world. Compare the account of the CREATION which is given by *Moses*, with the ravings of Sanchuniathon the *Phenician* philosopher, which he hath dignified with the title of COSMOGONY; or compare it with the childish extravagancies of the *Greek* and *Latin* poets, so justly likened by the author to *a sick man’s dreams* \*; and then say, whether any person of candour and dis-

\* Natural history of religion. XV.



cernment will not be dispos'd to exclaim in the words of the prophet, *What is the CHAFF to the WHEAT* \*! The account is what we should call, in reference to our experience, *miraculous*. But was it possible it should be otherwise? I believe the greatest infidel will not deny, that it is at least as plausible an opinion, that the world had a beginning, as that it had not. If it had, can it be imagin'd by any man in his senses, that that particular quality should be an objection to the narrative, which he previously knows it must have? Must not the first production of things, the original formation of animals and vegetables, require exertions of power, which, in preservation and propagation, can never be exemplified?

It will perhaps be objected, That if the miracles continued no longer, and extended no further, than the necessity of creation

\* Jer. xxiii. 28.

requir'd,

requir'd, this reasoning would be just; but that in fact they both continued much longer, and extended much further. The answer is obvious: It is impossible for us to judge, how far the necessity of the case required. Immediately after the creation, things must have been in a state very different from that which they are in at present. How long that state might continue, we have not the means of discovering: but as, in human infancy, 'tis necessary that the feeble creature should, for some time, be carried in the nurse's arms, and afterward, by the help of leading-strings, be kept from falling, before he acquire strength to walk; 'tis not unlikely, that, in the infancy of the world, such interpositions should be more frequent and requisite, till nature attaining a certain maturity, those laws and that constitution should be established, which we now experience. It will greatly strengthen this conclusion,

to reflect, that in every species of natural productions, with which we are acquainted, we invariably observe a similar feebleness in the individuals on their first appearance, and a similar gradation towards a state of greater perfection and stability. Besides, if we acknowledge the necessity of the exertion of a power, which only in reference to our experience is call'd miraculous; the question, as is well observ'd by the judicious prelate formerly quoted\*, "whether this power stopped immediately, after it had made man, or went on and exerted itself farther, is a question of the same kind, as whether an ordinary power exerted itself in such a particular degree and manner, or not." It cannot therefore, if we think reasonably on this subject, greatly astonish us, that such a book should give "an account of a state of the world, and of human na-

\* Analogy of religion, &c. part 2. chap. 2. sect. 2.

"ture,



“ ture, entirely different from the present ;  
 “ of our fall from that state ; of the age  
 “ of man extended to near a thousand  
 “ years ; and of the destruction of the  
 “ world by a deluge.”

Finally, if, in such a book, mingled with the excellencies I have remarked, there should appear some difficulties, some things for which we are not able to account ; for instance, “ the arbitrary choice  
 “ of one people, as the favourites of Heaven ; and their deliverance from bondage by prodigies the most astonishing  
 “ imaginable ;” is there any thing more extraordinary here, than, in a composition of this nature, we might have previously expected to have found ? We must be immoderately conceited of our own understandings, if we imagine otherwise. Those favourites of Heaven, it must be likewise own'd, are the countrymen of the writer ; but of such a writer, as of all historians

or

or annalists, ancient or modern, shows the least disposition to flatter his countrymen. Where, I pray, do we find him, either celebrating their virtues, or palliating their vices; either extolling their genius, or magnifying their exploits? Add to all these, that, in every thing which is not expressly ascrib'd to the interposal of Heaven, the relation is in itself plausible, the incidents are natural, the characters and manners such as are admirably adapted to those early ages of the world. In these particulars, there is no affectation of the marvellous; there are no "descriptions of " sea and land monsters; no relations of " wonderful adventures, strange men, and " uncouth manners \*."

WHEN all these things are seriously attended to, I persuade myself, that no unprejudiced person will think, that the

Pentateuch bears falsehood on the face of it, and deserves to be rejected without examination. On the contrary, every unprejudiced person will find (I say not, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than all the miracles it relates; this is a language which I do not understand, and which only serves to darken a plain question; but I say, he will find) very many and very strong indications of authenticity and truth; and will conclude, that all the evidences, both intrinsic and extrinsic, by which it is supported, ought to be impartially canvassed. Abundant evidences there are of both kinds; some hints of them have been given in this section; but to consider them fully, falls not within the limits of my present purpose.

CON-



## C O N C L U S I O N.

WHAT is the sum of all that hath been now discussed? It is briefly this: *That the author's favourite argument, of which he boasts the discovery, is founded in error \**, is managed with sophistry †, and is at last abandon'd by its inventor ‡, as fit only for show, not for use; that he is not more successful in the collateral arguments he employs; particularly, that there is no peculiar presumption against religious miracles ||; that, on the contrary, there is a peculiar presumption in their favour \*\*; that the general maxim, whereby he would enable us to decide betwixt opposite miracles, when it is stript of the pompous diction, that serves it at once for decoration, and for disguise, is discover'd to be no other than an identical

\* Part I. sect. 1.

† sect. 2.

‡ sect. 3.

|| sect. 4.

\*\* sect. 5.

proposition.

*proposition, which, as it conveys no knowledge, can be of no service to the cause of truth \* ; that there is no presumption, arising either from human nature †, or from the history of mankind ‡, against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of Christianity; that the evidence of these is not subverted by those miracles, which historians of other religions have recorded || ; that neither the Pagan \*\*, nor the Popish †† miracles, on which he hath expatiated, will bear to be compar'd with those of holy writ; that, abstracting from the evidence for particular facts, we have irrefragable evidence, that there have been miracles in former times ††; and, lastly, that his examination of the Pentateuch is both partial and imperfect, and consequently stands in need of a revival |||.*

“OUR most holy religion,” says the

\* Part 1. sect. 6. † Part 2. sect. 1. ‡ sect. 2. || sect. 3.

\*\* sect. 4. †† sect. 5. ‡‡ sect. 6. ||| sect. 7.

author in the conclusion of his essay, " is  
" founded on faith, not on reason; and  
" 'tis a sure method of exposing it, to put  
" it to such a trial, as it is by no means  
" fitted to endure." If, by *our most holy religion*, we are to understand the fundamental articles of the Christian system, these have their foundation in the nature and decrees of God; and, as they are antecedent to our faith or reasonings, they must be also independent of both. If they are true, our disbelief can never make them false; if they are false, the belief of all the world will never make them true. But as the only question between Mr Hume and the defenders of the gospel, is, Whether there is reason to believe those articles? he can only mean by *our most holy religion*, our belief of the Christian doctrine: and concerning this belief we are told, that it is founded on *faith*, not on reason; that is, our faith is founded on our faith; in  
other



other words, it hath no foundation, it is a mere chimera, the creature of a distemper'd brain. I say not, on the contrary, that *our most holy religion* is founded on *reason*, because this expression, in my opinion, is both ambiguous and inaccurate; but I say, that we have sufficient reason for the belief of our religion; or, to express myself in the words of an apostle, that the Christian, if it is not his own fault, may *be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh him a REASON of his hope.*

So far therefore am I from being afraid of exposing Christianity, by submitting it to the test of reason; so far am I from judging this a trial, which it is by no means fitted to endure, that I think, on the contrary, the most vehement attacks that have been made upon the faith of Jesus, have been of service to it. Yes: I do not hesitate to affirm, that our religion

hath been indebted to the attempts, tho' not to the intentions, of its bitterest enemies. They have tried its strength indeed, and, by trying, they have display'd its strength; and that in so clear a light, as we could never have hop'd, without such a trial, to have view'd it in. Let them therefore write, let them argue, and, when arguments fail, even let them cavil, against religion, as much as they please: I should be heartily sorry, that ever in this island, the asylum of liberty, where the spirit of Christianity is better understood (however defective its inhabitants are in the observance of the precepts) than in any other part of the Christian world; I should, I say, be sorry, that ever, in this island, so great a disservice were done to true religion, as to check its adversaries, in any other way, than by answering candidly their objections. I must at the same time acknowledge, that I am both  
asham'd

asham'd and griev'd, when I observe any friends of religion, betray so great a diffidence in the goodness of their cause (for to this diffidence it can only be imputed) as to show an inclination for recurring to more violent methods. The assaults of infidels, I may venture to prophesy, will never overturn our religion. They will prove not more hurtful to the Christian system, if 'tis allowed *to compare small things with greatest*, than the boisterous winds commonly prove to the sturdy oak. They shake it impetuously for a while, and loudly threaten its subversion; whilst, in effect, they only serve to make it strike its roots the deeper, and stand the firmer ever after.

ONE word more with the essayist, and I have done. "Upon the whole," says he, "we may conclude, that the *Christian religion*, not only was at first attended  
" with



“ with miracles, but even, at this day,  
“ cannot be believ’d by any reasonable  
“ person without one. Mere reason is in-  
“ sufficient to convince us of its veracity;  
“ and whoever is moved by faith to assent  
“ to it;” that is, whoever by believing is  
induced to believe it, “ is conscious of a  
“ continued miracle in his own person,  
“ which subverts all the principles of his  
“ understanding, and gives him a deter-  
“ mination to believe, what is most con-  
“ trary to custom and experience.” An  
author is never so sure of writing unan-  
swerably, as when he writes altogether  
unintelligibly. ’Tis impossible that you  
should fight your enemy before you find  
him; and if he hath screen’d himself in  
darkness, ’tis next to impossible that you  
should find him. Indeed, if any mean-  
ing can be gather’d from that strange as-  
semblage of words just now quoted, it  
seems to be one or other of these which  
follow:

follow: *either*, That there are not any in the world, who believe the gospel; *or*, That there is no want of miracles in our own time. How either of these remarks, if just, can contribute to the author's purpose, it will not, I suspect, be easy to discover. If the second remark is true, if there is no want of miracles at present, surely experience cannot be pleaded against the belief of miracles said to have been perform'd in time past. Again, if the first remark is true, if there are not any in the world who believe the gospel, because, as Mr Hume supposeth, a miracle cannot be believed without a new miracle, why all this ado to refute opinions which nobody entertains? Certainly, to use his own words, "The knights-errant, who wander'd about to clear the world of dragons and giants, never entertain'd the least doubt concerning the existence of these monsters \*."

\* See the first paragraph of Essay 12. Of the academical or sceptical philosophy.

Might I presume faintly to copy but the manner of so inimitable an original, as the author hath exhibited in his concluding words, I should also conclude upon the whole, That miracles are capable of proof from testimony, and that there is a full proof of this kind, for those said to have been wrought in support of Christianity; that whoever is moved, by Mr Hume's ingenious argument, to assert, that no testimony can give sufficient evidence of miracles, admits, tho' perhaps unconscious, in place of *reason*, a mere *subtilty*, which subverts the evidence of testimony, of history, and even of experience itself, giving him a determination to deny, what the common sense of mankind, founded in the primary principles of the understanding, would lead him to believe.

T H E E N D.

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